Boston Public Library
39999054713944

Black Fan

Mary Boyle O'Reilly

ARCHIVAL CENTER

PZ3
No. .0668 BL
A

Boston Public Library

Do not write in this book or mark it with pen or pencil. Penalties for so doing are imposed by the Revised Laws of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

This book was issued to the borrower on the date last stamped below.

STACK FOUR

FORM NO. 609; 12,3,37: 50CM.

THE BLACK FAN

51.9829

THE BLACK FAN

MARY BOYLE O'REILLY

PUBLIC LIBRARY
OF THE
CITY OF BOSTON

THE REILLY & LEE CO.
Chicago New York

[1928]

Printed in the United States of America

APR 2 1928

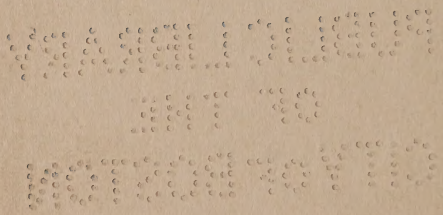
51.782 a

Mar-11.1929

E PZ3 .O668BL A

Copyright, 1928
by
The Reilly & Lee Co.

All Rights Reserved



The Black Fan

To James Smiley Murphy

Loyal Generous Wise

With the Gratitude of Thirty Years

THE BLACK FAN

Prologue

"Out in the World"

The high bare walls of the big schoolroom glowed with splashes of splendid color, ruby-red, gold and green spun of the sun, falling through a great painted window. The gorgeous glass pictured St. Catherine of Sienna, astute and dominant as in those medieval days when alone, poor, a daughter of the people, but the most single-hearted patriot of her time, she dragooned an emperor, disciplined prelates, persuaded wavering popes, until she had permanently influenced the Italian politics of her age. The beautiful, strange face looked down on a circle of girls clad in black uniforms, all sewing with silent industry, while one

from their number read to them a vibrant war ode.

"Strong gongs groaning as the guns boom far,
Don John of Austria is going to the war,
Stiff flags straining in the night-blasts cold
In the gloom black-purple, in the glint old-gold,
Torchlight crimson on the copper kettle-drums,
Then the tuckets, then the trumpets, then the cannon, and he comes.
Don John laughing in the brave beard curled,
Spurning of his stirrups like the thrones of all the world,
Holding his head up for a flag of all the free.
Love-light of Spain—hurrah!
Death-light of Africa!
Don John of Austria
Is riding to the sea."

Noiselessly a door opened and Mother Superior, with the verve and the eye of a woman of action, preceded a smiling bishop into the room. Teacher and class rose as one person and, at a discreet *click* of a wooden signal, saluted the newcomers with convent deference. One pupil alone, worldly-wise and quick-witted, broke ranks with a profound court curtsy. Mother Superior's delicate brows frowned, protesting the obvious intention. The smiling bishop chided her with large tolerance.

"Tut, tut, Maggie," he said.

The listening girls thrilled. Maggie! And to Mother Superior!

Easy and gracious, the bishop addressed the class mistress. "You will pardon this interruption, *Ma Soeur*. Your militant reading intrigues me. What have we here, suffragists?"

A much confused little nun smiled deprecatingly. It was Mother Superior who replied:

"Nonsense, Mat! We are training our girls for the places they should take out in

the world. Their Patroness, as you must know . . . "

His glance followed hers to the painted window.

"I remember and admire your choice," commented the bishop. "Between ourselves, Maggie, I always have walked wide of the sighing saints. *Ma Soeur,*"—to the class mistress—"will your reader give us another bit of that splendid war chant?"

The girl on the pulpit, obviously nothing loath, turned a page.

"King Philip's in his closet with the Fleece about his neck
(Don John of Austria is armed upon the deck.)
The walls are hung with velvet that is black and soft as sin,
And little dwarfs creep out of it and little dwarfs creep in.
He holds a crystal phial that has colors like the moon,
He touches, and it tingles, and he trembles very soon.

* * *

"He sees as in a mirror on the monstrous twilight sea
The crescent of his cruel ships whose name is mystery;
They fling great shadows foe-wards, making Cross and Castle dark,
They veil the plumed lions on the galleys of St. Mark;
And above the ships are palaces of brown, black-bearded chiefs,
And below the ships are prisons, where with multitudinous griefs,
Christian captives sick and sunless, all a laboring race repines
Like a race in sunken cities,
Like a nation in the mines.

* * *

Don John pounding from the slaughter-painted poop,
Purpling all the ocean like a bloody pirate's sloop,
Scarlet running over on the silvers and the golds,
Breaking of the hatches up and bursting of the holds,

Thronging of the thousands up that
labor under sea
White for bliss and blind for sun and
stunned for liberty.
Vivat Hispania!
Domino Gloria!
Don John of Austria
Has set his people free!"

"Ah," exulted the bishop, and laughed down at his protesting sister.

With a little bow the girl reader closed the book, and stepping from the pulpit, noiselessly returned to her chair.

The bishop's shrewd glance studied the suddenly self-conscious ranks, knowing that every girl knew why he was there. It had all happened before. Some one amongst the Austrian archdukes desired an English governess for his children. What more natural than that Monseigneur, whose suave judgment all trusted, visit his only sister, whose beauty and charm were still remembered at the Viennese Court, and choose a suitable candidate from among her pupils? Official Austria recognized the

prelate as the Sovereign Pontiff's own representative at the Hofburg, and saluted him as a Nuncio who presently was to be a Legate with the princely rank of a *Legatus A Letare.*

Very episcopal in his court cassock and wide purple sash, he walked along the waiting lines with the soldier stride of the Guards officer he had been. Beside him moved Mother Superior, alert and impersonal, her fine face within the white wimple faintly anxious lest any girl addressed fail to do credit to the convent instruction.

Slowly the stately couple made the circle. After one brief interrogatory, Monseigneur was heard to say, "Meg, I confess a worldly prejudice against a split infinitive." Of another candidate he put the severe question, "Maggie, *who* is responsible for this slip-shod French?"

His observant eyes next recognized the girl reader.

"What is your name, Child?"

"Carmel Stapleton, Your Lordship."

"Then you are Sir John Stapleton's

daughter? He is my good friend. Be kind enough to remember me to him—warmly."

He held her in frank talk. Her brown eyes looked at him with pleasant curiosity. Somewhere between them a bit of metal tinkled to the floor. Neither moved to retrieve it. A faint flush swept up the girl's slender throat but her unwavering eyes still smiled to him with pretty deference. With an approving salute the bishop passed to the next girl, moved on more quickly, presently bowed to the class mistress and her scholars—and was gone.

A wave of excited talk sprayed across the bare room.

"Which of us will be chosen?"

"Oh, Carmel, how could you! To ignore whatever the bishop let fall! See, it is this wee little Austrian coin. It might have been His Lordship's pencil case."

"But, then again, it might not," countered Carmel.

The wooden signal *claqued* reproof.

"We will resume our reading," announced the mistress of sewing.

Instant silence succeeded.

"In that enormous silence, tiny and unafraid,
Comes up along a winding road the noise of the Crusade.
Strong gongs groaning as the guns boom far,
Don John of Austria is going to the war."

But the ring had gone out of Chesterton's staccato chant. No one gave heed. The girls were listening absorbedly for the sound of a swaying wooden rosary, the soft, hurrying footfall of a homemade shoe.

"Hush!"

"Listen!"

Again the door opened and a white-veiled novice, twittery with excitement, came through. A feminine zest for drama held her silent as she looked at the staring class. Then, with conscious calmness, "Carmel!"

Carmel, her face pale, stepped from the reader's pulpit and stood waiting dismissal.

Discipline controlled her as drill holds trained troops under tension.

"You may fold your needlework, my dear."

My Dear! Then it *was* Carmel who was going to Austria! The class drew an audible, sighing breath. She of the court curtsy began to sob miserably. Mother Superior's messenger brushed invisible dust from the girl's severe uniform and helped her to arrange the long, black chapel veil across her hair. "Oh, Carmel," she said, "I am so glad for you. If it were not against the rule I would hug you. You are to come at once to Mother Superior—in her office."

* * *

As the door opened, Carmel saw that Mother Superior was seated in her high backed armchair beside her table desk. A rosary lay twined about the fingers of one hand, but she was not praying. Instead, her introspective glance rested on a bronze statuette of St. Catherine of Sienna, before which flickered a faintly scented oil light.

The regulation curtsy made and acknowledged, the Superior spoke.

"Carmel, come here to this chair beside me. I have much to say to you. Monseigneur has chosen you to go to Austria as governess to the little sons of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand. The first commandment of loyalty to your employers is—Silence. Your duties to your pupils will be defined by the Duchess, or by Her Highness's *Maitresse de la Cour*. Our talk is of personal matters.

"When you leave us, my child, you will remember to pray, however briefly, whenever you hear a clock strike, or a church bell ring."

"Yes, Reverend Mother."

"You will continue to school your eyes to see no evil, your ears to hear no evil, your tongue . . . Carmel, *you* must be specially resolute to guard your tongue."

"Yes, Reverend Mother."

"In dealing with others you will be straight thinking, simple and kind. Many of your new companions will be women of

worldly minds — ladies - in - waiting. To them, as to your elders, you will be respectful and obedient while silently adhering to the standards which we have tried to set before you."

"Yes, Reverend Mother."

"And, in your social relations with gentlemen of the court, you will be neither forward, nor yet shy. Never forget that most men are better than they pretend to be. Trust your intuition. Should you detect impertinence from any man, however high his position, resent it instantly, and at once withdraw. Never parley. You understand?"

"Yes, Reverend Mother."

"And, finally, you will reflect daily on the example of great service given us by St. Catherine of Sienna. Carmel, my child . . ." she drew the girl toward her with an anxious, maternal gesture, "you are going alone into a world from which many women have fled." She paused. A vision of the old life had flashed back. Her slender, black-robed figure unconsciously took

on the subtle grace of a great lady. Her frail hand covered Carmel's.

"We had hoped to keep you with us for always, my dear. We have only a great peace to offer, Carmel. You are still too young to realize the deep joy of that peace which passes all understanding."

Her wise, tender glance studied the girl's face turned toward the little statue of St. Catherine.

"Tell me, child, of what are you thinking?"

The young, young eyes looked into those of the Mother Superior—grave and honest.

"I was thinking, Mother, how good it must be . . . just to be alive . . . out in the world."

Above the flickering votive lamp the bronze Catherine of Sienna seemed to smile.

CHAPTER I

Whom the Gods Would Destroy

For some inscrutable reason the Archduke, ignoring half a hundred imperative engagements, decided suddenly to spend three days in the lonely castle at Konopist.

Even I, Basil Badani, in constant attendance on His Imperial Highness and accredited his chief confidant, could offer no explanation. Four of us, all aides-de-camp of the military household, laid wagers on the possible reason. Was it the appeal of his beloved roses, now exquisite in their mid-June abundance? Or some stinging, secret suspicion that a fit of Hapsburg mania was recurring? One possibility we discounted. It could not be the lure of a pair of bright eyes and dainty ankles . . . Trust Her Highness of Hohenberg for that!

"Of all living women *Die Chotek* is best

equipped to prevent poaching. It takes one poacher to trap another," Max Revertera observed, lounging in the equerries' office.

True, but unpardonable. In the fourteen years since the Countess Sophie von Chotek, then maid-of-honor to the Archduchess Isabella, laid down the black fan of a lady-in-waiting to grasp at the diadem of an Empress-Consort, she had shown herself a princess above reproach; ambitious, resolute, vain, if you will, but a woman with a political brain. Even she who adventures at high hazard should be protected from slurs by her sex. If we of the entourage sometimes sinned against chivalry, blame it, in part, on the demoralizing dullness.

"Can real life be anywhere so stupid as we know court life to be in a palace?" I demanded of Max Revertera.

He laughed in his easy, cynical manner.

"All life is a gamble, my son, with the dice loaded against us. *Kismet!* Be thankful for the small winnings. Suppose we were here alone, without that tantalizing

little lady, Mademoiselle Carmel Stapleton, demure, venturesome, Celtic to her pink finger tips? Suppose . . . ."

"Drop it," I exclaimed testily.

Max flashed me a quizzical look above the cigarette he was lighting. His handsome face became grave.

"Your pardon, Captain." He gave the ceremonious military salute.

We were old friends, firm friends; he Chief of the Imperial Bodyguard for-the-Heir; I, Captain, First Regiment Franz Joseph Hussars, Chief of the Military Household of His Imperial and Royal Highness, the Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria-d'Este, Heir Presumptive to the Dual Empire. A dozen years had sped since, mere boys, we entered the military academy together, Max to become "a great cavalry captain;" I "hoping to climb to the Great Headquarters Staff," each of us eager to swim life at flood tide. Fate seemed our friend. Graduated with honors, commissioned in historic regiments, given appointments at Court and then . . . boredom!

True, the old Emperor, always a stickler for the petty proprieties, had once observed that of all the gentlemen in attendance none wore bootstraps with such consummate skill as did Count Max Revertera, Captain of Blue Hussars. "What equerry could wish better epitaph?" the Groom of the Chambers had murmured reverently. On hearing which Max laughed—his characteristic, mocking laugh. But never afterwards did he appear at the palace in riding boots.

"My career as a cavalry captain recedes behind the mountains," he told me. "It is by such puerilities as bootstraps that the cynical and shrewd now climb to leadership in Franz Joseph's ramshackle empire."

Character is fate. While Max, embittered and purposeless, turned to trivialities for amusement, I, less forceful, less resentful, found interest in my routine duties, in a few friends, in many books. Sometimes it still pricked my pride that I, Basil Badani, "well born" through ten recorded generations, passing rich as wealth is reckoned in

Eastern Europe, not ill-looking, perhaps, reasonably ambitious, was, in my twenty-eighth year, a mere automat, lounging in anterooms—a kind of keeper to that morose and unpopular Archduke who was so prone to mysterious journeys and to lurking in lonely gardens.

How often had Max and I, sweating and dirty from a stiff military problem at manoeuvres, paused to scoff at some visiting Royalty's popinjay adjutants—upstanding fellows, of course, tall, handsome, graceful as women, gorgeous as cockatoos in their skin-tight uniforms, always gifted with manners absolutely admirable and with intellectual faculties perfectly sufficient but invariably idle-minded, apparently empty of emotions, empty even of passions. Such adjutants, like ourselves, were ready as a matter of course to fight all their masters' duels or, at need, to safeguard all their masters' *liaisons*. And each of them, like either of us, anticipated for reward long years of adjusting the machinery of life to the comfort of his particular

"High-Born." It stung to realize that Max and I, our boyish ambitions banished, must henceforth rate as our highest duty an unswerving loyalty to the maddest of Austria's mad archdukes.

A terrifying thought crashed through my day dreaming. Suppose Franz Ferdinand, irresponsible like all his forbears, had come to Konopist for such reasons as sent our first Heir Apparent to that sinister hamlet in the hills . . . Meyerling! Suppose that while I lounged near him in the great gardens . . . The fleeting suspicion brought me to my feet. I drew nearer my imperial master, venturing to a garden bench within the permissible degree of distance. From that vantage point I could see across the sunlit plain of a pleasance of roses the tall, gray clad figure of the Archduke, burly to bulkiness in his woven armor, standing portentous as a man in steel. One hand plucked impatiently at his sword hilt, the other raised a field glass to his eyes. Apparently his Highness saw, as I could not see, some one approaching—

probably the some one whose coming had summoned us from the Belvedere into Bohemia. Could it, after all the years, be *another* lady-in-waiting? Was La Maintenon about to succumb to a Montaspas, and I, unluckily, be there as witness? No, thanks to the Goddess of Good Fortune, it was not that. Through the silence, faint but significant, sounded staccato orders and the far-borne *clink* of military accouterments. Just below my horizon an officer of the day was turning out the guard. A bugle sang *Heil Dir Un Siegeskranz.* The approaching visitor must therefore be a German commander—as we say in Austria, a War Lord.

Presently a tall, elderly man came striding forward. He wore an admiral's uniform, and I particularly noticed his magnificent forked beard. Even down the wide vista of the garden his stride proclaimed the Prussian. Another moment and he turned to salute with obsequious deference an undersized figure advancing with processional gait. So He had come again!

Memory recalled the strained, ashen face with its fox-red hair and epileptic eyes. It was He, *Der Einzige*, the Only One, returned to plot mischief in the gardens of Konopist.

And yet, there was something about the awkward frame, some aura of sovereignty, some imperial influence, which compelled me to my feet in instinctive salute. He saw. No martial movement ever escapes these staring eyes, and seeing, he raised his right hand in acknowledgment. Next moment that powerful hand, laden with Byzantine rings, was clasped by the Archduke.

The three men paused, clicked heels, saluted, wheeled and marched in silence to a hill-top arbor. As personal adjutant I followed so that Franz Ferdinand's voice might summon me at need. Our footsteps on the velvet turf were noiseless. Soft, piercing sweet, the eerie echo of a dirge floated through the perfect peace. A Polish conscript from one of Austria's subject armies was passing to his grave with Chopin's deathless music.

Reaching the summer-house, the Imperials seated themselves before a rustic table and instantly began to study a big staff map already spread open. Sometimes one rose to bend above it; again, each in turn stabbed at the stiff linen with tiny flags mounted on long pins. Their voices, level in earnest talk, failed to disturb the droning bees.

An hour sped. The admiral withdrew.

Another hour . . .

Phrases which floated to me indicated that the discussion dealt with *welt politik*. Had Germany's Peace Lord heard of the Archduke's recent mental illness when the Heir of Austria spent days shooting at flies on the windows, and portraits on the walls? Was Franz Ferdinand, traditional plotter like all his Most August House, urging new police methods against the peoples of half Europe? Were the two under the roses arranging the mastery of the Mediterranean by Austro-German squadrons? Were they plotting the "inevitable" struggle of *Deutschtum* against Slavdom? Was that

world riddle, the age-old Eastern Question, being debated? *Qui Bobo?* To whose benefit?

Obviously the conference was a state secret. No secretary in attendance, no councilor called into consultation, no equerry summoned, they two, alone . . . commanders of ten million bayonets, autocratic rulers of almost two hundred million men—say, rather, of two hundred million mere *canaille,* since, to the scions of an Imperial House, any man below the rank of baron is hardly a human being. To realize that in this twentieth century untrammelled power still lay in the hands of hereditary princes! The sinister possibilities seemed to steal warmth from the sunshine. A breeze, slightly chill, swept showers of petals from the rose trees.

But why should I, Basil Badani, feel unwonted depression? Thinking men realized that Europe had seldom been more tranquil, more prosperous; the workers never more industrious, more contented. True, Austria, under a moribund Em-

peror, was a despotism tempered by carelessness. But when a monarch is eighty-four, any day may see the Crown Prince in control.

If Max Revertera were only beside me, with his cynical insight into human motives and his shrewd knowledge of political intrigue!

Again palace clocks clanged.

From the rose arbor voices guttural and strident rose in angry discussion. Whatever the contention, I could detect that it was the German Emperor who demanded, the Austrian Heir Apparent who vehemently refused. The Hapsburg Prince, always contemptuous of the "upstart" House of Hohenzollern, seized and rolled up the great map. I could see that both men were standing. The "Only One," dwarfed by comparison with his giant host, stared up at him gloomily.

Ill-fortune follows those who see their masters quarrel. Retiring to a discreet distance I, as *flugeladjutant* in attendance, signalled the sentry to warn the Captain of

Blue Hussars. Next moment the Imperials emerged from the arbor and came toward me slowly, side by side, silent, stern, walking like tired men. The Archduke's bulky torso slouched grotesquely in his bullet-proof cuirass; the Hohenzollern's weak left leg dragged shockingly and his withered arm hung ungainly as a lifeless thing.

Out of the sky, suddenly overcast, a gusty wind from some Russian *steppe* set rose bushes tossing and twisting, denuding them of their rich blooms in an instant. The gold spurs of both War Lords tramped down the blood red petals. North, East and West the escort under Revertera marched into the garden and took up their positions.

It was the twelfth of June, 1914.

From Valparaiso eastward to Vladivostok the world of common men was at peace. But I, Basil Badani, aide-de-camp to the coming *Kaiser von Oesterreich*, had seen the masters of Middle Europe, each of them heir to hereditary madness, stabbing at a great staff map with battle symbols in their game of war!

CHAPTER II

A Midsummer-Day's Dream

If Mademoiselle Carmel Stapleton had kept her eyes on her book and blushed ever so slightly as Max and I crossed the sun flecked lawn to the tree shaded school tent I should have recognized the invitation and known what to do. Instead she exclaimed cordially, with her frank smile, "Prince Max! Prince Ernsti! Here come our 'Two Gentlemen of Vienna.' They bring you recess."

Both boys, tossing their lesson books into the air, flung themselves on us, shouting a welcome.

"How glad I am you have come," sighed Mademoiselle Stapleton, glancing from Max to me with tantalizing impartiality. "It is warm, is it not? And the children

are tired . . . with geography still to come."

Revertera, oblivious of all else, smiled at her in silence.

My mind's eye sees her now as she looked that day: A slight, self-reliant little figure, a vivacious, sun-browned face; a straight gray gown with wide schoolgirl collar of filmy white stuff caught together with a big bow tie; warm brown hair too severely smooth for modern fashion; dark eyes, intelligent and tender as only beautiful brown eyes can be; and, more instantly noticeable than all else, a beguiling pose of grown-up-ness and premature authority.

Quite resolutely she led us from the seclusion of the bronze beeches toward the open gravelled area of the garden. The hot, shimmering air was laden with the cloying scent of citron trees, of roses and mimosa.

Prince Max dragged at my arm. "Come this path," he pleaded. "Let's forget geeog'fry."

"Forget?" I remonstrated, calmly pedagogical. "Surely you like geography?"

Both boyish faces protested.

"We can't understand what half of it means," confessed twelve-year-old Max.

"It is Dear-Mamma who teaches us," little Ernsti added shyly.

My glance caught Mademoiselle's attentive eyes as she stood bending to inhale the fragrance of pale day lilies blooming about a sundial.

"Her Highness considers map work a mere background for political geography," she explained politely.

"But, surely, these mere children—"

For an instant warning spoke from her big brown eyes, warning, almost fear, for me. Could it mean that already I had begun to mean more to her than did other gentlemen of the archducal household—Max Revertera, for instance? Her look of open friendliness denied it. No suggestion of shyness, no hint of coquetry. I might have been a mere man cousin whom she trusted and liked.

Her eyes avoided Revertera as she drew a watch from her belt with a professional air.

"Ten minutes to build a Danube fort with that new mown grass. Captain Badani is chief engineer," Mademoiselle Stapleton announced briskly. The glint of ill-concealed displeasure flashed into Revertera's black eyes. His thin face with its bony cheeks and high curved nose took on a haughty look.

"With permission," he said quietly, accepting his *conge* with the military salute of a soldier dismissed.

Instantly both boys were gathering armsful of lawn mowings. Mademoiselle, all interested approval, leaped lightly onto a little terrace, near enough for casual comment, far enough to be quite impersonal. No *fraulein* willing to be more than cordial would have taken up such a position. From the strategic elevation her glance, perhaps unconsciously, followed Revertera's gallant figure, vivid in blue and silver, receding rapidly across the garden. Six feet

two inches, supple as a Toledo blade, broad from shoulder to sword belt, slim to leanness from thigh to spur, swinging into the distance with the traditional stride and swagger of a Blue Hussar, Max was, in all truth, a man whom any maid might well admire. Another minute and he would pass between the lichened lions on the gray gate posts into the parade ground of the Guards regiment. A sense of exasperation stung me as I looked from the soldierly figure to the wide-eyed girl day-dreaming on the terrace. For a moment she was totally oblivious of my presence. With a bow I turned to devote myself to outlining parapets, embrasures and towers on the close cropped sod. The boys, eager to surprise their father, shouted for the Czech youths who, in picturesque national costume, attended the princes at their games. Quickly a stool banked with earth became a revolving turret; leaves recklessly torn from copy books indicated concealed gun emplacements; an armful of hastily gathered roses were to be . . .

"Prince Max! Prince Ernsti! Count Badani!" Mademoiselle Stapleton's low-voiced warning reached us at the final instant.

The Archduke, wearing his long white coat over a gorgeous uniform, still truculent and scowling from yesterday's quarrel, was striding toward us beside his imperial guest. His heavy black moustache emphasized the almost ghastly pallor of his face.

The boys, always fearful of their father in his irascible moods, stood instantly at stiff salute.

"Good!" ejaculated Wilhelm Hohenzollern with a martinet inspection of the tense little bodies. 'What have we here?"

"A new fort, Sire," panted the elder prince, advancing to kiss the Emperor's hand. "You see, it's—it's made of grass because we had only ten minutes before geography."

"Not if I stay," announced the Emperor with a whimsical look toward the girlish governess, and seating himself beneath a gay garden umbrella, tousled the nearer

small head with a fatherly gesture. One recalled suddenly that he had a household of his own boys at home—boys already grown into troublesome manhood.

"Sire, Dear-Mamma is coming now," we heard little Prince Ernsti whisper as Mademoiselle and I bowed and withdrew the customary distance.

From our vantage point we could watch the Duchess descending into the garden by the terraced stairway and walking quickly through the half shadows of the long pergola, followed, of course, by a lady-in-waiting. Grown accustomed to the constant presence of trusted attendants, Her Highness abstractedly acknowledged our respectful obeisance, giving Mademoiselle a courteous gesture of dismissal. Instantly Mademoiselle swept down in a low curtsy. Even at home and in private, court ceremony was obligatory. Her Highness, the Archduchess Isabella, most arrogant of all the Hapsburgs, might, nay, often did, dispense with elaborate etiquette. But the Duchess of Hohenberg, morganatic wife of

the Heir, consistently ostracised by the Most Insolent Family, becoming daily more fearful for her personal position as she watched her husband's health and mind failing—Sophie von Hohenberg would abate no jot or tittle of her hard-won honors.

Not many women of five and forty dare challenge criticism as she did by facing the summer sun rays with uncovered head.

Even a casual observer must have noticed instantly Her Highness's regal coronet of lustrous blue-black hair and the golden wedding ring worn without guard or ornament on her slim, strong hand. Only after that, and very subtly, the Duchess's costume conveyed the suggestion of its wearer's queenly qualities. Dressed in some rich white stuff which fell in long, shimmering folds, Her Highness might have passed unnoticed into a village chapel, or, without the addition of a jewel, have proceeded a queen-consort, to share her husband's throne. A typical Southern Slav, petite, blue-eyed, intangibly magnetic, the

lovely face which had won the Austrian Crown Prince and led him to the marriage altar had, in a dozen years of defiance and discontent, become haughty and masterful. But the cordial smile with which she greeted her imperial guest recalled that the Potsdam Court was the first to ignore her undetermined status and to receive her with royal honors despite the House of Hapsburg. Should the German Kaiser elect to remain her friend in the hazardous near future, no one dare foretell to what power so extraordinary a woman might attain.

The boy princes running to meet their mother bowed sedately and kissed her hand.

The Emperor arose and remained standing while the Duchess slowly seated herself!

Her lowered eyelids hid any look of triumph, but the imperious lift of her proud head boded ill for the Most Serene Family.

"You see, Franz," she observed, as if continuing a conversation.

Obviously, the Archduke understood.

His dull, sullen face flushed slowly, a dusky red. His glance, oddly tender and grateful in that grim face, passed from his wife's elusive smile to the shrewd, watching eyes of his observant guest.

"Thank you, Wilhelm. Let us be seated," he said huskily and turned away as if to conceal a stab of overwhelming emotion.

"Your *kinder*," suggested the Emperor suavely, "were about to study a lesson in geography. Suppose I become their teacher? Make haste, Max, wheel forward your geographical globe. You, being the heir, shall begin."

No one spoke while the eager boy obeyed.

"Observe," resumed Germany's War Lord, "we shall use this blood-red crayon to sketch new frontiers. Suppose we draw a line from Revel, on the Baltic, along the east frontier of Russia's Governments—Livonia, Kovno, Minsk, by Kiev, and the River Neiman, to Odessa, on the Black Sea; then, by the Bessarabian Coast, turn-

ing North through the Carpathian Mountains to Cracow, and along Poland's western frontier from Kalisz to Thorn; finally *across East Prussia to Danzig, including, of necessity, part of the German Duchy of Posen. What realm would that be?*"

"Sire, it would be the old 'Great Poland of the Jagellons'."

"Correct. *Who* taught you that?"

"Mother."

"I thought so," snapped the Emperor, and flashed a quick, understanding look on the Duchess.

The Archduke, crooked finger on lip, pondered stolidly.

But Her Highness, one of the world's most enigmatic women, soon to be the heroine of the world's greatest mystery—*Her Highness* realized that the secret of her ambition was her secret no longer. Her clear, ivory pallor assumed slowly a startling whiteness; her dark blue eyes, dazed with overwhelming hope, stared into an invisible future.

An equerry in the splendid uniform of a Hapsburg regiment approached the Archduke.

"Imperial Highness, a telephoned message from Schonnbrunn palace. Prince Montenuovo begs to learn when Your Imperial Highness will condescend to receive him?"

Stiff and Germanic the Archduke considered. Still standing at attention I heard his ungracious reply. "Say to the Grand Chamberlain that I shall receive him *at His Majesty's pleasure.*"

"Now, Ernsti," prodded the imperial schoolmaster, drawing the shy little fellow toward him with a protecting gesture, "look at the big globe. Try to think, try hard! See, you shall hold this red pencil while I guide your hand. Suppose we start at Cracow, in North Galacia, draw a boundary line east of Bukowina, Hungary, Roumania, and Bulgaria, *way down to Salonica on the Aegean Sea.* Then west, round Serbia and Albania to the Adriatic, going along Hungary's west frontier to

Cracow again, *leaving all German Austria to join with Germany*. What country would that be?'

"That would be all the Jugo-Slavian Lands, a new empire—an empire of the Southern Slavs."

Almost solemnly the Emperor's glance swept the lovely Slav face turned bravely but blindly toward him. Unwonted emotion caught me by the throat as I saw the Duchess, who had always proved the stronger spirit of the two, stretch her ringed hand to clasp her husband's with an unfamiliar, helpless gesture. Not since he had sought and claimed her in her father's debt-burdened little castle, to which she fled when dismissed in disgrace by the angry Archduchess Isabella, had Sophie Chotek known such a moment of weakness. For a space there was silence.

The Duchess drew an audible, sighing breath.

"Such frontiers would involve the revision of all frontiers in Eastern Europe,"

she mused. "They would constitute a *Mittel Europa*, create two great new kingdoms . . ." Her voice sank to a whisper . . . ceased. Even she dare not add that the grandiose plan implied that when the imperial mummy in Vienna made his belated exit, and, in due time, the Archduke laid down the Dual Crown, the heritage of "Karl, the Usurper" must be hacked to pieces to create kingdoms for her non-royal children. Thus, if Franz Ferdinand's heir could not reign over Austria-Hungary, no other Hapsburg should. There would be a second significance to the arrogant "*M'r San M'r* . . . We Are We." So, at no distant day, for the Archduke was already a stricken man, she, Sophie Chotek, *high-born*, but "Outcast" because not of the "Eighty," would be the Queen-Mother of Emperors, while that Prince of Evil who led her into a very high mountain to show her the kingdoms of the world and the glory thereof would govern a Europe reigned over by boys . . . as the King of Kings!

So this was the future possible for her flouted children!

Acutely intelligent, Her Highness realized, none more clearly, that woman as an intellectual being had counted for little in the lives of the Hohenzollern princes.

"Franz," asked the Duchess, "what would this plan cost?"

The Archduke's sluggish mind considered the question. A deep wrinkle appeared between his brows. His saturnine glance turned toward the Emperor who sat watching, a protecting arm round each of the little boys who, on their imperial father's death, must become non-royal subjects of that father's nephew.

"Assuredly it would cost war," growled Franz Ferdinand's guttural baritone.

"You mean—against Russia?"

"With Russia and Serbia, of course. Probably against France; even Great Britain, also."

"In such a war Europe would have no interest at stake. Would our army be willing to fight?"

His Hapsburg face expressed astonishment.

"*Willing?*" he challenged. "That I do not know. Their consent would not be asked. Vast political changes do not rest on the will of the people. The people are serfs, or soldiers, born by the will of the Eternal, to work out the ambitions of their hereditary Lords."

"War is the unpardonable crime of kings," I heard the Duchess murmur.

The Hohenzollern Monarch broke in harshly.

"Unless war come, and soon," he contradicted, "*Europe must suffer widespread revolution . . . A cataract of thrones . . . The rise to world dominion of republican America!*"

Again silence fell.

The Duchess's face grew stern. Was she thinking—she, the dreamer of proud dreams—of that soul-searing day when, standing beyond the pale, opposite the Most Implacable Family, she heard her future husband, the Crown Prince, take oath:—

"I, Franz Ferdinand, by the grace of God Archduke of Austria and Heir Apparent to the Dual Crown, swear before God, The Almighty, that I recognize the Hapsburg House Laws, and that, in the event of my marriage to Sophie, Countess Chotek, I recognize my marriage to be morganatic. Therefore, I take oath that the children which, by God's blessing, may be born of my marriage will not be equal in birth with the Most August Family, and, in accordance with the Pragmatic Sanction, will not be entitled to succeed to the Throne either in Austria or in Hungary."

Her Highness's eyes turned toward those children as they stood, puzzled and silent, but leaning contentedly, with a child's sure instinct, against the most powerful monarch on earth. Again memory, inconceivably bitter, brought back her own oath of renunciation:—

"In-as-much as the issue of our marriage will not be members of the

Most Arch House I agree that they shall possess no right to succeed to their Father's dignities and honors."

The choice of a new, possibly a splendid future, now confronted their mother. The moment had come for her to decide whether the sons who could not bear their father's name must grow up embittered, without rank, purposeless; or, instead, become sovereigns of a mighty Catholic state, hacked from schismatic Russia (how gladly any Sovereign Pontiff would approve), and of an empire torn from predatory Austria —*An Empire of the Slavs, her own people* . . . first of the martyr races through a thousand years of Austria's political despotism.

How often had we of the entourage heard her Highness declare that all the great founders of states and dynasties needs must have employed reprehensible methods: that if, perforce, the sons of a million mothers must march through the shambles to secure the vast political

changes of our time, consider what their sacrifice would win!

Her Highness's eyes stared across the great demesne to the violet-veiled mountains on the sky line. Far as she could see it was all hers, hers and her children's, beyond confiscation for all time. Life might be sweet and full of peace in the dream world of Konopist. But her sons, grown to manhood, nameless, drifters, here in her own Bohemia, the heart of ancient Czecho-Slovakia! There lay the naked choice—Peace or Ambition. Every plan she had pondered since the distant day when she stepped into history weighed to hamper her decision.

The instinct of leadership brought the Duchess to her feet.

"Franz," she adjured the slow-witted man beside her, "were this plan ratified I should be happy as a queen. We must decide now. To-morrow may be too late. Greatness must be dearly bought! For weal, or woe—"

"For weal, or woe," echoed the Archduke, turning a face transformed by a great love on his Babies.

"Wilhelm," he said at last, "it appears —it appears that I must send again for yesterday's staff map. We must re-read. We shall initial your pact. Let us begin all over again!"

CHAPTER III

"The Assassin Behind the Arras"

While the Blue Hussars changed guard in the inner courtyard, to stirring strains of trumpet music, the Archduke's entourage began to assemble for the evening obeisance to their Imperial Master as he passed, with old world formality, into dinner.

The "Ancient Schloss" and the "New Castle," built about an enormous flagged quadrangle, were connected on their longest facade by a wide stone corridor, walled, floored and domed with red granite. At the far end of this great hall an imposing white marble staircase, overhung by a minstrels' balcony, led to the state salons and the archducal apartments.

Throughout its enormous length this gallery displayed Gobelin tapestries of incal-

culable value and huge dim paintings of princely personages once members of the House of Hapsburg. Beneath the pictures immense cabinets of priceless *boule*, their veneer of tortoise shell backed by gold bronze, alternated with cases of glass and gilded metal which held Franz Ferdinand's jealously guarded collection of carved jades, exquisite ivories and rare specimens of natural history.

Presently lights appeared in the state salons and soft strains of old, old music drifted from the minstrels' balcony.

Another moment and four powdered lackeys in resplendent liveries advanced in pairs to loop back the long, heavy hangings of the wide high windows so that soldiers of the Household Guard and peasants from the estate might stand outside on the dark terrace and watch the passing of the "High-Born." Following the flunkeys, a steward of severe demeanor ordered a rearrangement of several enormous tapestry screens.

Then the palace pantler, immaculate in

white linen, passed with a responsible air to superintend the affairs of his department. In rapid succession came the Master of Horse, silver crop in hand; the Chief Huntsman, all in green, an upstanding eagle's feather in his odd peaked cap; the Falconer, holding a hooded hawk on his gauntleted fist, that an ancient custom might not die; the Master of Hounds, whistling softly an old regimental tune, a privilege inherited from his father who had ridden with the Archduke's imperial father to crush the Hungarian Revolt; the Secretary-Librarian to the Duchess, walking sedately with His Highness's Apothecary as they debated some scholarly subject; the Major-domo, wearing his chain of office and followed by a file of footmen. It was a household which took itself seriously and approached almost with reverence the ceremonial hour of its daily life. Hard and fast rules of rigid etiquette obligatory at the Viennese Court were observed with painstaking precision at each of the archducal seats.

Palace rumor whispered that Franz Ferdinand, resenting the Imperial Family's ostracism of his Duchess, sought by the everyday customs of his palace to indicate the ultimate dignity of Her Highness's future position. For, casual about so many social matters, His Imperial and Royal Highness had, since his marriage, become adamant anent the Hapsburg etiquette of the dining hall. *Bon comrade* all day, the fanfare of dinner trumpets made him instantly *grand seigneur*.

To minimize friction in the household arrangements I habitually took up a strategic position in the Archduke's military cabinet, formerly the Guard Room of the Ancient Schloss, transformed almost two centuries since into a splendidly paneled chamber with domed ceiling upheld by four black marble columns.

Max Revertera, very gorgeous as a captain of Blue Hussars, was with me. Both of us were, of course, in parade uniform, trailing swords, silver spurs, even plumed *chapeaux* tucked into our elbows.

In every palace it is second nature to remember that the walls have ears. Max led me outside the shadow of the towering black columns onto the wide hearth of a cavernous fireplace, a position certain to outwit an eavesdropper.

"Basil, the sentry at the wicket reports to me, 'A Chamberlain has just arrived from His Imperial Majesty.' Better instruct the Captain of the Guard now on duty to spy on this spy."

"But he comes as a guest!"

"Chivalry, my son. Noble absurdity! To-day, *Imperials* spy! Honors once sacred to great service now crown the Emperor's jackals."

"Max, you wrong yourself!"

"Not I! Men must climb at any cost—witness this ferret chamberlain. He comes to make mischief. Franz Ferdinand will richly reward the man who discovers what he wishes to know. The end justifies the means."

"Max, you do not believe a word you are saying."

"Do not judge others by yourself. Honesty—" He paused.

Mademoiselle Stapleton had just entered with her pupils in their evening satin; Prince Max leading Zizka, the "wisest" of their huge dogs, little Ernsti, whose turn it was, carrying with anxious care his Lady Mother's usual bouquet. This being placed with ceremony on a table of marquetry, the boys and their great dog disappeared into the magnificent Winter Garden where they could play at their pleasure or watch the proceedings in the Long Gallery, themselves unobserved.

Mademoiselle Stapleton courteously laid aside a scholarly Quarterly she had brought to fill an idle hour.

"International politics! Ye Gods!" commented Revertera.

Mademoiselle refused to deprecate.

"This would be a wicked world—if it were not so interesting," she conceded. "I read recently that the monarchs of Europe are debating the problem of international peace—or imminent war. Debating, mark

you! Then consider the mental status of the chief reigning sovereigns. One of them —senile; one—epileptic; the third—a dipsomaniac; the fourth—a natural born fool!"

I made haste to close a door.

"Does this mean that you are a republican?" I ventured.

Mademoiselle eyed me with precocious reproof.

"I am a teacher, Count Badani. A teacher preparing pupils for to-morrow. The greatest man of the last century prophesied, 'In a hundred years Europe will be Cossack, or Republican.' We are on the eve of that end. To-morrow is the fifteenth of June—almost the centenary of Waterloo."

Her girlish gravity gave me pause.

"If I may be allowed to remark it," I said to start a less dangerous conversation, "are you not especially elegant to-night?"

She made no secret of her pleasure. "Oh, do you like it? I should not tell, perhaps, but this is my almost best dress."

Max and I paid the dress the tribute of good intentions. Even to our masculine eyes the claret colored stiff brocade, though handsome, was obviously ungirlish. It was old-fashioned in color and "ancient" in cut. At a moment when every daughter of Eve wore wavy *coiffure* and clinging chiffons, Her Highness insisted that the Ladies of the Household, particularly the younger and more attractive ladies, dress their hair shining smooth and assume bombazines—almost crinolines, if a blundering male dare attempt to quote their descriptive adjectives.

"But why one's 'almost best dress' tonight, if the question be not indiscreet?"

"Indiscreet? Nonsense!" laughed Mademoiselle Stapleton with girlish cheerfulness. "I thought you both knew. Prince Montenuovo has just arrived. He dines with Their Highnesses and the entourage."

"The Emperor's Grand Chamberlain?" exclaimed Max, his face grim and combative. Bad temper caught me by the throat.

"If that unmitigated black-leg . . ."

Mademoiselle Stapleton's inquiring face turned from one of us to the other.

"Neither Max nor I admire the Controller of the Imperial Household," I told her.

"I wonder why not," commented Mademoiselle, eyeing the point of her shoe.

"Do you also wonder what brings His Highness here?" demanded Revertera.

"No, Count," said Mademoiselle simply. "I *know* that."

"Then you *know* more than do the Gentlemen of the Household," he insisted. "Montenuovo is an assassin behind the arras. He has, for more than twenty years, systematically intrigued to prevent our dual parliament, to prevent even the relatively progressive members of our Imperial Family from urging the old Emperor toward a less autocratic and a more modern regime. If all the Liberals in Europe had one throat, Montenuovo, like the old Caesar Caligula, would be glad to cut that throat. He is a thoroughly dangerous man.

Mademoiselle, it is entirely unwise that you should risk . . ."

She turned from him to indicate her displeasure.

I smiled wryly, assuming that I recognized a familiar move in an old, old game. Max, indignant to indiscretion, meant inevitably a Max presently apologetic. And Max in contrite mood could, as he well knew, win more than forgiveness from any woman.

But, instantly, Fate played against him.

"Count Revertera," called little Ernsti from the Winter Garden. "Oh, Captain! *Captain!*"

What could he do but respond? Catching up his plumed *chapeau* he strode hastily from the room.

Realizing that we were alone for a moment only, Mademoiselle Stapleton raised her head to look at me.

"Count Badani," she demanded impulsively, "why is Count Revertera annoyed with me? Please tell me frankly."

"Frankly, I do not know."

In her perplexity she came a step nearer. "You like me, don't you? Well, I like you. Life is often puzzling out in the world, I suppose, but it certainly is queerest in a palace, especially when a girl is a long way from home. It would sound like fairy tales in Ireland if I told my family what happens here. Sometimes I imagine that the worst is yet to come. Did you ever feel as if this castle is haunted—as if a bell would toll and we would all vanish, leaving the great rooms peopled with our ghosts and the gardens filled with fading roses?" Her olive skin, with its bloom of youthful color, paled perceptibly.

"Tut! Tut!" I remonstrated, venturing a big brother attitude. "You are nervous, Mademoiselle, because of the heat. Let us talk of something more distracting—the Lord High Chamberlain, for instance. You *know* why he is here?"

Her beautiful brown eyes, so vivid and compelling that one forgot the rest of her face, met mine.

"He comes," she said soberly, her voice

just edged with an accent that gave it piquancy, "he comes bringing a command from His Apostolic Majesty. Her Highness told me yesterday that Kaiser Franz does not wish our Archduke to attend next week's military manoeuvres. The Province is disturbed. His Imperial Highness is unpopular. Worse, the day chosen on which to seize Slav conscripts for Austrian regiments is a Slav national holiday—*Kossovo!* Moreover, His Majesty forbade the Duchess to accompany her husband."

"So the trip will be cancelled?"

Mademoiselle Stapleton shook her head with such friendly vehemence that a flutter of little ringlets appeared upon her temples.

"How blind you are!" she rallied me. "Surely you can understand that the Duchess will disobey."

"Why should she?"

Mademoiselle sighed for patience. "Because," one slim sun-browned fore-finger emphasized each point as if I were Max,

or Ernsti, and she driving home a lesson in history, "because the Duchess at Serajevo will appear *for the first time* in the full limelight at her husband's side—not in Saxony, remember, nor in Berlin, nor even at Rome, but *within* the Dual Empire. Because her very presence may protect her husband; because Serajevo is the capital of Bosnia, and Bosnians, like the Duchess, are Slavs. Therefore, at Serajevo, Her Highness will be greeted as a—"

Finger on lip she prudently left the last word unspoken.

"I see," I confessed, never dreaming how little I saw. "Now tell me, O Lady Minerva, as a last condescension, tell me, how long will the Controller of the Imperial Household remain at Konopist?"

Her face became reflective. "I think," she answered, as one who gropes in the dark, "I think he will wish to stay until he discovers what he came to find out. Even you can see that the Emperor's commands anent manoeuvres are merely a pretext for his visit. Otherwise the imperial

orders would have come as usual, in code, or in clear."

"But what has Montenuovo come to find out?"

Again she smiled as her eyes met mine. "That," she admitted honestly, "I have yet to learn. And when I do, probably I shall not tell. The nuns in the convent always taught us that it is a wise girl who keeps her own counsel. But this I can tell you because I found it out for myself: Any woman can outwit a mere man, *but it takes a really clever girl to outwit another woman.*"

The rising rhythm of flutes and violins signalled the approach of an important guest. It could only be the "assassin behind the arras." To avoid him I disappeared into the Winter Garden where, unseen, I could observe his every move.

Probably no man ever looked so sinister as the Imperial Chamberlain appeared to me while he sauntered down the long gallery pretending to study the best pictures on the way. Short of stature, of self-in-

dulgent plumpness rendered more noticeable by his mincing, high-heeled gait, Prince Montenuovo, grandson of a long dead Archduchess's morganatic marriage, was, by inheritance and instinct, an unscrupulous court ferret, discontented and ambitious. Old Mother Nature, who brands us each according to our deserving, had marked His Highness with pale, lashless eyes which served him best in semi-darkness and blinked uneasily when exposed to clear daylight. The Prince wore the imposing lavender and silver uniform of his high office and carried an imperial blue envelope in his hand. The *ensemble* served to emphasize the official character of his visit. He knew, none better, that Her Highness would keep him waiting, by way of reprisal for the tacit insults he, as Controller of the Imperial Court, invariably offered her when she passed the dais at the Hofburg.

From my place of retreat behind the palms in the Winter Garden I saw Mademoiselle brace herself ever so slightly as

she listened to the sound of his silver spurs on the parquet.

At sight of a lady-of-the-palace apparently waiting, the two pages in scarlet and gold who had attended the prince through the labyrinth of passages from his apartments paused, bowed simultaneously, and withdrew, walking backward. Shrewd like all their ilk, they instantly surmised a prearranged tete-a-tete.

With Revertera's warning in mind I decided to remain within call. Next moment I heard the Grand Chamberlain's throaty voice.

"Ah, whom have we here? The charming governess, is it not? Mademoiselle has doubtless forgotten me?"

Mademoiselle spread her too ample skirt in a prim little curtsy. "No, Monseigneur. Yours will, I feel certain, be among the last Austrian faces I forget."

Her glance strayed with naughty intentness from his blinking eyes to his high-heeled shoes.

Montenuovo, f r o w n i n g perplexity,

screwed his black-ribboned monocle into place.

"Ah, Mademoiselle, I am charmed. Mademoiselle is, if I remember, English?"

"Monseigneur is gracious, but mistaken. I am Irish."

"Is there, then, so great a difference?"

"Does a Hungarian wish to be called Austrian?"

The *impasse* imposed silence. Prince Montenuovo, unprepared for rebuff from such a source, sought distraction, and a *boutonniere*, from Her Highness's bouquet. His white hands waved, with a womanish gesture, above the flowers.

"Monseigneur will pardon me," remonstrated Mademoiselle Stapleton, diffident in apology, "but the Duchess of Hohenberg prefers to herself distribute floral favors—to her friends."

"Do I count in that category?"

"Monseigneur is, of course, the best judge."

"Ah, that is better. I begin to remember. Mademoiselle's charming name is Carmel.

One does not often see such lovely Irish eyes. Tell me, dear Mademoiselle Carmel, a certain August Personage has just visited Konopist, has he not?"

"An August Personage?"

Montenuovo gave the girl a rapid and penetrating glance. "Well done, Mademoiselle, but perhaps a shade too much perplexity. To speak frankly, I know that the 'All Highest' was here yesterday."

"Since Monseigneur knows, why does Monseigneur ask?"

"Ah, what *naivete*, what *repartee*, what wit! You Irishwomen can give the *pas* to any women in Europe! Fortunate the man who wins your regard. Will Mademoiselle be seated? I must, of course, speak in confidence. My mission is delicate. Our Kaiser Franz is an old and broken man. While he reigns Austria's future lies in the past. His empire is a patchwork of restless—yes, to you I dare admit it—of rebellious peoples. Serbia, grown powerful during two recent, victorious wars, is attracting to herself our Austrian Slavs. The

political horizon grows darker. To-morrow, perhaps, or the next day—who knows? That is why I seek—more, I need—a friend here in the palace of the Heir Presumptive. You follow me, dear Mademoiselle Carmel?"

"I wish to follow, Your Highness."

"Ah," ejaculated the Lord High Chamberlain, "that quick Irish brain. That Celtic love of politics. That—that—how shall I say it?"

"That national curiosity to see behind the scenes, Prince."

"*C'est le mot juste.*"

"Will Monseigneur condescend to continue? I am very much interested," pleaded Mademoiselle, almost laying her finger tips on his velvet sleeve.

The Prince of Montenuovo caught her hand and gallantly carried it to his lips.

"As I felt that you would be, dear Mademoiselle, once you understood. Be assured I know how great is your penetration." He seated himself with the air of a familiar friend preparing for a confidential talk.

"The facts are these. Yesterday the 'All Highest' was here, secretly. You do not deny it? No. Did he come to plot peace, or war? To-day, *bien entendu*, the Prussian Crown Prince is motoring secretly, with experts in strategy, athwart Belgium, along the march of a German invasion into France. The state of affairs in the Balkans has become intolerable to the Austrian Foreign Office. Bosnia has been 'pacified' by force of arms, but is seething with discontent. Whole districts are wild to get their sons away from Austrian conscription. If Herzegovina is to be held, Serbia must be conquered. Russia is building a Pan-Slavic league against the Dual Empire. This calls for the long-considered ultimatum against Russia's ally, Serbia, and an immediate vengeance promenade to Belgrade. But, *Der Alter Herr*, the 'Old Man,' now four score and four, commands peace. The Heir Apparent, executive head of our army, refuses to mobilize. Obstinate like all his Most August Family, he cannot be persuaded. Soldier though he is, Franz

Ferdinand has, for ten years, been constrained to peace by the Duchess of Hohenberg. You follow me, Mademoiselle?"

His intriguing manner offended. She drew back with natural dignity. "Monseigneur makes himself perfectly clear."

The old coxcomb made an ingratiating move toward her. "Since the Archduke will not be advised there remains—what?"

"Ah, Monseigneur sees these great matters so clearly, while I—I am so stupid."

"Stupid! My dear, you wrong yourself. High politics are not for a woman's brain, my pretty maid. To continue, since the Archduke cannot be persuaded, he must be—bribed!"

"Bribed? Your Highness, it is impossible!"

"Not so, dear Mademoiselle, for the bribe, like the prize at stake, is magnificent. Any day may bring Franz Ferdinand all that a man could wish—possession of the Dual Crown. The Duchess will then receive whatever her husband can give.

There remain the boy princes of Hohenberg, who have, and can receive, nothing. Is it for them that Wilhelm of Hohenzollern came to Konopist—an enemy sowing tares? The Old Grey House, our Foreign Office, more than suspects that he offers for these disinherited children two principalities sword-slashed from central Europe. We fear that in return the Archduke will bind himself as Austria's Emperor to cede to the German Empire the German Hereditary Provinces of the Austrian Crown. That loss would not grieve Her Bohemian Highness, but it would reduce the Heir of Hapsburg to the position of a German vassal prince. To prevent this, to protect Deutschdom against Slavdom, next week's military manoeuvres in Bosnia should be the immediate prelude to armed attack on Serbia, victorious but war-worn, after the last two years' fighting in the Balkans. There, dear Mademoiselle, lies the question which you may help to answer: What did the Imperials decide here yesterday? Was it for peace, or for war? Did

they quarrel, or did they drink *Bruderschaft*, Brotherhood, and swear to stand by each other? Did they reach a final decision? Was that decision committed to writing? A great treaty?"

"If Monseigneur desires, I can tell him about a Great Treaty."

"Mademoiselle, I am all attention."

Hands clasped about her knee she bent forward slightly, her eager face in shadow, her manner calm and smiling as she could assume.

"Highness, there was a 'Great Treaty.' By it both rulers agreed that to prevent bloodshed, to ensure permanent peace, certain lands could later be transferred from one government to the other. Also, that the population of these transferred provinces should forever be unhampered in the practice of their religion. Also, that any of the people in the lands transferred, who wished to emigrate, should be free to leave the country, taking with them their families, their wealth and all their personal property."

The Prince's glance, full of treachery and falsehood, focused on the girl's vivacious face; the embittered mind, astute and ambitious, looked out of his lashless eyes.

"Mademoiselle, you astonish me—you delight me! When, where was this truly great treaty signed?"

"At Limerick, Monseigneur, during 1691, in the 'City of the Violated Treaty.' We Irish hold the Treaty Stone to this day, as a symbol of bad faith!"

She threw back her head and laughed delightedly. Her gayety was infectious, but the "assassin behind the arras" did not laugh. Long years spent in peering over the shoulder of a somnambulant old Emperor to filch the information which propels its possessor to power had not prepared him against being outwitted by a venturesome girl.

As Carmel laughed the black ribboned monocle fell from his eye.

"Mademoiselle," he admonished harshly, arrogantly, "I can be a good friend, a

valuable friend, and—and a formidable enemy."

Again I saw her drop that inimitable little curtsy.

"If Monseigneur permits," answered the demure small voice, "I think that I prefer Monseigneur as—as an enemy," and without another word the royal governess turned away as if to join her pupils.

Montenuovo remained beside the *lapis lazuli* table, staring down at Her Highness's bouquet. Grimly he moved the Emperor's blue envelope an inch or two nearer the flowers. Then, assuming himself unobserved, he drew from beneath his tunic and laid beside the imperial order a flutter of black feathers. It was a court lady's fan. His saturnine look was not pleasant to see as he turned from the table —to confront Mademoiselle.

With quiet dignity she lifted the blue envelope and laid it, as court etiquette demanded, on a golden salver. Then, picking up the fan, spreading its plumes for an instant, and closing it with a resolute

little gesture, she offered it to the Prince.

"This is yours, Monseigneur."

"Say, rather, it belongs to the Duchess, being, as you know, the insigne of a lady-in-waiting."

"Her Highness has no further use for such insigne."

"It may, then, serve as a souvenir, perhaps as a warning. Our Chotek Cinderella may again find it a bar sinister against her ambition."

"Again?" She laid the fan beside the flowers.

"Mademoiselle is too young to remember. It is quite a fairy story. Listen. Once upon a time, the Archduke Franz Ferdinand went to pay court to the daughters of the Archduchess Isabella. The Most August Family had decided that one of them—it mattered little which one—was to be the coming Empress-Consort of Austria-Hungary. For many months Franz Ferdinand daily visited the gorgeous Palais Friedrich. Suddenly the Archduchess Isabella discovered that her daughters had

been jilted for her lady-in-waiting! Disgraced at court, Sophie Chotek fled to her father's shabby little castle. Presently it became known that the 'Little Lady in Bohemia' was living in His Highness's forest palace at Konopist, and what was worse, that a marriage solemnized by the Court Chaplain had been contracted in the presence of the Archduke's step-mother, and of his half-sister, the saintly little Abbess Maria Annunziata. None dare doubt that triumvirate. Still, His Highness, the Prince Imperial, lived in lonely state in the Hofburg at Vienna; the Countess von Chotek, become the Princess of Hohenberg, in lonely state among the roses at Konopist. Three years passed; two children were born. To women like Sophie Hohenberg men like Franz Ferdinand of Hapsburg are merely the biological necessity. Two more years passed. The Princess, become a Duchess, recognized *chatelaine* of Konopist, was dreaming dreams that might pull down the pillars of Europe. Austria, Germany, the Triple Alliance began to fear

the woman who knew how to wait. One fact alone offered comfort. The Duchess had won her Archduke, but only by renouncing all royal rank for their children. The Arch-Dames of the Most August Family even insisted that she take the oath of renunciation while holding *a black fan!* No doubt the sight of this fan will remind the Duchess of that auspicious occasion, may, perhaps, warn her before it is too late. For by her plotting—"

"Plotting? Say, rather, following her heart's impulse. Despite all cynical jest, Monseigneur, there is no love so compelling as married love, when there are children. His Imperial Highness and the Duchess thought they could renounce greatness for their children—until they *saw* their children."

"Ah, Mademoiselle," he scoffed, "who would imagine it! You, an idealist!"

"Monseigneur forgets that I come of one of the great Little Nations which have taught the world that ideals are moral dynamite."

The Lord High Chamberlain inclined himself profoundly. "It appears," he observed, holding his temper in check, "it appears that I must leave to you the last word. Defend the Duchess as you will, the fact remains that to-day she plans treason against the Hapsburg Family. Our *ci-devant* lady-in-waiting has chosen to play a dangerous game. She is not the first, nor, while ambitious women grasp at power, will she be the last. These things come in cycles."

"Monseigneur will, perhaps, do me the honor to explain."

"Gladly. *Attendez.* A quarter of a century since there was a Baroness Marie Vetsera, a lady received at Court—Slav, of course. She infatuated Austria's then Crown Prince, an only son, who, said the seers, was to be a constructive king and the admitted leader of the Teutonic Powers. Rudolph promised to marry his baroness and make her Queen of Hungary. Had they lived to reign they, and their *camarilla,* would have dominated the Near East

for half a century. Well, they died together, suddenly—only Germany knows how—at Meyerling."

"Monseigneur!"

"I know whereof I speak, Mademoiselle. These things have never been mysterious to the men who make history. Once more, listen. After Rudolph and his Vetsera died, a dozen years passed. Then the wheel of fate turned. Mme. Draga Maschin, also a Slav, also a lady-in-waiting, won that great calf, Alexander, Crown Prince of Serbia, like Rudolph an only son. He married her—made her his Queen. Had they lived to rule, Slavdom would have shut the Iron Gate to Byzantium against the Germanic Empires. Well, they died, together, suddenly, in the Kornak at Belgrade, while a certain ambassador watched their slaughter from his window. The officers who killed them and who hatcheted Queen Draga wear a distinctive Cross of Honor to this hour. Perhaps a certain Foreign Office could explain."

"Monseigneur!"

"Yes, I mean it. Austria can risk no Slavic queens in Central Europe. The threatened State of Yugo-Slavia can rise only on the ruins of the Empire. If the Germanic Bloc is to retain supremacy in *Mittel Europa* a war to decimate superfluous Slavs must be declared before 1915. Sophie Chotek's ten years of effort to prevent a great war in the Balkans is only part of the Pan-Slav plot. The Russian Bear, clawing his way across Eastern Europe, is not yet ready to seize Constantinople. But Sophie Chotek will fail as Marie Vetsera failed, as Draga Maschin failed, though—though—" his taunting finger pointed—"though I have to *beat her back with that black fan!*"

Mademoiselle Stapleton's slight figure stiffened. Taking up the fan, she faced the Emperor's ferret. I heard her say with a cold politeness she had never shown before:

"Monseigneur must pardon my stupidity. I did not grasp his point of view. In my country men do not plot against women.

Still I absolve Monseigneur. For Monseigneur did not plan this episode; it carries the ultimate insult, the feminine sting. Monseigneur is therefore merely the jackal —as we say in Ireland, the cat's-paw— of that really clever person, the Archduchess Isabella. I beg that Monseigneur will report to Her Highness what he thinks he has learned about the 'Treaty': That he has no proof such a document was ever drafted, that he cannot find such a paper, that it rests with Her Archducal Highness to do so."

A significant silence followed.

The opening bars of the Austrian anthem, falling from the minstrels' balcony, warned them both that the Archduke was approaching. Prince Montenuovo, eager to salute his unwilling host, bowed curtly and passed into the long gallery. As he did so the Polish tutor to Prince Max, and the Hungarian instructor to Prince Ernsti, took up their accustomed positions on the lowest step of the state staircase, signalling their pupils to join them.

A louder strain from flutes and violins announced a stately little procession, slowly descending the wide marble steps, His Highness in advance, his broad chest glittering with jeweled orders, talking nonchalantly with three deferential equerries as he casually acknowledged the obsequious salutations of his dependents. The boy princes, grave and a little nervous, stepped forward to kiss their father's hand, returning to their tutors with apparent relief. Five paces behind the Archduke, two pages wearing doublets of cerise satin bore flambeaux of pink wax set in tall golden candelabra. This ancient custom was familiar time out of mind at Konopist. Since the days of chivalry a similar evening ceremony had conducted the *Chatelaine* of the castle from her private apartments to be the light of the great hall. A murmur of respectful admiration came from the groups of soldiers and Slav peasants who stood along the dark terrace peering into the illuminated palace. Well aware of this audience the Duchess came slowly down

the marble stair, beautiful in shining silver brocade, sparkling with gems from coronet to train. Behind her walked three ladies-in-waiting.

Little Ernsti, eager to present his bouquet, ran half way up the staircase. Prince Max followed, smiling anticipation of his Mother's good night embrace.

From the stringed instruments came the stirring anthem, "*God exalt thee, Mighty Monarch.*"

Mademoiselle Carmel, standing in the shadow of the wide door to the Archduke's study, remembered suddenly the fan she was still holding; recalled, too, its insulting significance. With a glance at Prince Montenuovo's fat back she sped across the military cabinet to His Highness's favorite writing table. The center drawer stood slightly open. Into it she dropped the black fan.

CHAPTER IV

The Red Pact of Konopist

As the motors purred from the *porte cochere* carrying Prince Montenuovo and his attendant gentlemen into the night, Revertera joined me on the terrace.

Konopist lies in the midst of a glorious wild country, forests stretching for leagues and leagues on every side. Beyond the fine old park opened an entrancing view of fir clad foothills falling steeply to the valley where a noisy little river widened into a lake surrounded by meadows in which rare flowers grew in the grass.

It piqued our curiosity to observe that since dusk had deepened to dark hundreds of Czech peasants from the villages of the vast estate, all wearing national costume, had assembled for no known reason about the castle.

"Whatever brings these people here," said Revertera, "we have one cause to be thankful. The 'Assassin' has gone, driven off, detected, exposed, checkmated. Mademoiselle has proven her brave prophecy of which you told me—'Any woman can outwit a mere man . . .'"

"But," I reminded him, "Mademoiselle also prophecied, 'it takes a really clever girl to outwit another woman'."

Instinctively we looked up to the windows of Her Highness's Apartments. "When," questioned Revertera, speaking cautiously as we entered the palace to walk down the long gallery, "when does *she* go?"

"In an hour," I told him. "They should reach Prague in good time to meet the Balkan express. The program for the journey was issued by the Controller of the Household in official fashion. She saw to that. Four ladies-in-waiting accompany Her Highness. It is quite a royal progress. The Archduke orders—"

The insistent ringing of a telephone bell interrupted me.

"From the home palace," I observed, and hurried to the military cabinet.

"Hello . . . Ready . . . Ready . . . Konopist . . . Badani speaking . . . At attention . . . Where are you? . . . The Belvedere? . . . What is that? Schonbrunn Palace? Yes, I hear.

"Revertera," I turned to Max, "notify the Archduke that an Imperial message is coming through. Evidently the old Emperor is following his orders with a verbal command. Yes . . . Yes . . . This is Konopist . . . Badani speaking. That you, Count Parr? What is the trouble?"

Next instant *Kaiserliche Hoheit,* His Imperial Highness, dour and determined, strode into the room.

"The Emperor's palace on the telephone, Sir. Adjutant Count Parr on duty. His Imperial Majesty wishes to know if his

Grand Chamberlain has delivered the blue envelope."

"Bid Parr report 'Yes'," growled the Archduke, flinging himself onto the armchair before his work table.

"His Imperial Majesty's aide-de-camp begs to learn if there is an answer."

"Bid Parr report 'No'," snorted the Archduke.

Over the wire from Vienna trickled an understanding whistle. One could almost hear the old monarch's terrifying "What's that?" when he learned his heir's truculent reply.

Gruff and absent-minded the "Co-Emperor" sat considering his next orders.

"Badani!"

"Sir."

"Your note book and a locked pouch."

I brought both.

"These," grumbled the Archduke, handing over a sheaf of papers, "are the latest stable accounts. Bid my Master of Horse reduce that grain bill in the future, or—" Scowling, he arose and reached for another

budget. "Here are the new recruiting plans for Croatia. Send a copy by messenger, who must travel with an armed escort, to the Governor General of the province. This is my order for the Dutch rose trees. See that it goes at once to Holland." He crossed the military cabinet to look out at the garden, lovely as a mirage in the moonlight. "We shall not return until the roses fade," he mused, almost wistfully. "My roses, and my babies—I like to think of them growing here together, far from the miasma of the capital."

In reflective mood he returned to the writing table. His formidable wrists, resting against the ledge, turned up the imperial order. Frowning, he studied the blue envelope, opened it, and withdrew the single sheet within. His suspicious, lackluster eyes became forbidding.

"'His Imperial Majesty, the Emperor, commands,' rumbled the heavy voice, 'His Imperial Majesty, the Emperor, *commands* that neither the Heir Presumptive, nor the Duchess of Hohenberg, shall attend the

military manoeuvres of the Fifteenth Army Corps.' "

His autocratic temper rising he scrawled a muttered comment across the ukase, returned it to its envelope, closed the blue flap with his personal seal and scrawled "Private, Franz Ferdinand of Austria D'-Este" above the date.

"In spite of which we shall be off in an hour," commented the Archduke.

"Now, Badani, close the door. I have something to say to you. You are the third generation in the service of my House. When I am gone you remain here—in charge. More, you must carry out certain confidential instructions while we are with the army in the mountains of Bosnia. Your attention. Sooner than the world dreams there is to be—there must be—war, the long planned, 'inevitable' punitive expedition which will bring Serbia under Austria's control. With six army corps I shall crush the Serbs in as many weeks, open our way to Salonika and secure Constantinople for the Germanic empires. To pre-

cipitate that war in the near future two things are imperative. First we must silence protest from Europe against a breach of peace; then, we must create war spirit within the Empire. I am the most hated man in Austria-Hungary. Before the army will follow me I must become popular, suddenly, without obvious effort. You understand me?"

His morose glance held mine.

"I do not, Sir."

"Wake up, man; think back. Kaiser Franz became popular, suddenly, in the 'Year of Insurrections'—'48. Old Wilhelm First became popular, suddenly, before revolt died down in Berlin. How?"

"They were attacked, Sir; shot at in the streets."

"Exactly. My time has come. We need war, a war forced upon us, to realize my plans. In this degenerate age some compelling pretext must be found before mobilization of European conscripts can be ordered. A pretext sufficient to silence protest; to precipitate hostilities; to make

me popular abroad; to create war spirit at home. I must be attacked, suddenly, in the streets of Serajevo. You have ten days in which to select the pseudo assassin."

"Impossible, Sir."

"I command."

"And I dare refuse."

"Badani, your father served my Imperial Father while he lived, your grandfather, my Imperial Grandfather. Your sons should serve my Sons."

"Sir, you have stated the reason why I must refuse. Whatever your plans, the only hope of their successful fulfillment rests with their absolute honesty. German-Austrians and Slavonic-Austrians are now foot against foot in a final struggle to decide which shall control the Danube Empire. Your Imperial Highness admits personal unpopularity in the disaffected provinces. The leaders of dragooned nations always are and must be plotters. No prince of the Most August House can outwit political intriguers. Bear with me, Sir. As my father served your Imperial

Father, so I would serve Your Highness. Already Schonbrunn Palace suspects that a secret pact—probably a war pact— exists these two days since, between Your Highness and the German Emperor."

"Prove that!"

"Prince Montenuovo came here to find out. He failed. Directly he reports, another more astute than he will follow. The Emperor's entourage will not desist until they discover if the pact be a verbal promise or a written document."

"Which confirms my decision. If you fail me, Badani, I shall command Revertera to carry out my orders. I do not wish to do that since he does not know our conquered provinces. Do you still refuse?"

"I must refuse, Sir."

"Then leave me! Go—go, I say. Faugh! You are faithless like all the rest; all—except One."

Familiar with His Highness's explosive moods I stepped back into the shadow of a black column awaiting recall—or final dismissal. The Archduke, accustomed

since childhood to fly into almost insane rages, struck with his clenched fist on his writing table. His brutal jowl quivered in a paroxysm of anger. With shaking hands he drew a narrow fold of parchment from his tunic—a scrap of paper boldly initialed by the two most powerful men in Europe. The geographical globe beside him spun under his peremptory finger.

"From Revel, on the Baltic, by Minsk, and Kiev, to Odessa." Crimson crayon outlining an unknown state, he compared the palm-wide parchment with the red line on the rotating map. Again his frowning face became reflective, wistful, as he brooded over the frontiers thus redrawn. "It must be—it shall be," he muttered. "Their mother pleads for it, I wish it, justice demands it. When we return from Bosnia's Oriental anarchy their mother shall have this signed pledge as her reward." His free hand opened the table drawer to find an envelope. He drew out the black fan!

For an instant he stared down in perplexity, then raised the fluttering feathers.

Memory interpreted their presence in his desk. How often during the period of his courtship had the woman he loved checked his anger against insults offered her by a restraining touch of her court fan. Those bitter days were past, but he imagined that she had laid the symbol of her subservient position where it would remind him that her will was his will, that he must decide for them both. One awkward soldier's hand caressed the sable plumes, the other drew a miniature from his breast. Mademoiselle had told Monseigneur the truth; there is no love so undying as married love—when there are children.

The cruel years, poisoned with rancor and humiliation by the malice of an archducal clique, had proved rich years for him. Long, long thoughts reminded Franz Ferdinand of the times beyond counting when he had hidden passionate *billets-doux* amidst black feathers. His practiced fingers found the little pocket and a whimsical smile crossed his moody face. He would answer the unspoken message in the old,

tender fashion. An instant he sat looking from the fan to the piece of parchment; an iron individuality, mentally not normal, who, by the irony of fate, held the future of twentieth century Europe in his hands. Then hiding the Red Pact of Konopist among the feathers, he laid the black fan where he had found it, and, smiling, closed the drawer.

CHAPTER V

The Black Fan

Thunder and Lighning,
Thunder and Lightning,
The Russians are with us
And those who withstand us,
We Slavs shall destroy!

Challenging trumpets high on the castle turrets flung *Hej Slovane* across a dreaming world. Below, in the vast dim park, the hundreds of Czech peasants who had walked leagues from their distant, lonely villages, began to chant the 'Forbidden Words.' All of them uncompromising rebels against Austria, they had foregathered to salute Her Highness of Hohenberg that she might leave Czecho-Slovakia for the citadel of South Slavdom to the War Hymn of the fighting Slavs!

Max and I stood dumbfounded, but at noncommittal salute, while the big blue motors roared into high speed.

Slowly, and for the last time, the Archduke's house flag fluttered down from the castle tower.

"Max," I reminded him, "the octogenarian Emperor is near his end. Hungary, refusing to recognize a 'half marriage,' now recognizes Franz Ferdinand's wife as their future Queen, and will recognize Franz Ferdinand's elder son as Hungary's future king. To what is the Empire coming?"

Max nodded absent-mindedly. "Only you and I and the All-Highest realize on this night of decision that the Chotek Cinderella has stepped into the fierce light focused upon a throne." Again the Captain of the Personal Guard nodded. The tranquil night, our graver thoughts, brought his finer nature to the surface.

Excitement compelled me to speech. "Obviously the Duchess is determined to put her power to the test. Three days have transformed her from a wife *a la main*

gouche, living in embittered seclusion, to a Crown Princess confidently approaching her coronation. If this change comes of Hohenzollern influence, assuredly she holds some promise—probably a promise committed to writing—possibly that very strip of initialed parchment with which the Hereditary Archduke consulted the map of Europe."

"I wish," exclaimed Revertera, protest in his voice, "I wish that Mademoiselle had not been so quick to retire. Only a woman can understand a woman."

"Go on," I urged, "and add that these Imperials live a life as remote from reality as was Simeon Stylites on his column. With high born conceit in their exalted birth they observe human misery as fireside idlers listen to a wintry wind."

"Precisely. Add also, that not for nothing is Franz Ferdinand the son of the 'Blue Beard of the Hapsburgs', the brother of that unpleasant madman, Archduke Otto. Believe it, or doubt, as you will, my orders for Serajevo are nightmare melodrama. I

am commanded to hire a Slav boy to pretend to assassinate the Heir of Austria!"

"Max, if you happen to choose a Magyar he will probably make good the task."

"Good Lord, man, don't jest. Our ramshackle Empire is this new century's Nineveh."

"Jest, Max? Not I. It is Austria's fate to be over-ruled by Germans, or undermined by Slavs. After us, the deluge!"

"After us," repeated Revertera, as he automatically flicked ash from his cigarette.

A moment of silence followed. Memory recalled a hundred incidents of our life together: the day when he hauled me off a maddened Hungarian mustang; the night when I pulled him, unconscious, from a perilous reach of the blue Danube.

Max was the first to speak, gravely, introspectively, his own best self. "Basil, how long can this last—our droning at Court, I mean? Did we ever plan to live our lives to some purpose?" He tried to laugh off his mood. Instinctively my hand

went to his shoulder in our old, schoolboy fashion.

"Max, I never imagine myself living my whole life here."

"What do you imagine, then—what's the future to hold?"

Only one man on earth dare ask me an intimate question. That man had the right to expect an honest answer.

"I imagine my future spent in a *schloss* by the Danube," I told him. "A dream castle not too humble, not too far from the world we know. A home with a nursery of tow-heads, books, . . . books by the thousand; a countryside peopled with friends; vineyards; a slowly increasing acreage; possibly a few years' service to the State—then, suddenly, the Long Sleep."

In the moonlight his comprehending smile lent his sophisticated face a curiously youthful look. "Add a small stable of good hunters, a sloop on the river for sterlet, an old fashioned peasantry, all Austrian, and your dream castle—while peace lasts—is mine. But," his passionate eyes turned

toward our mountain pass and the shadowy ranges beyond, "should *Der Tag* come in our time, and fighting men foregather, I would still wish to ride into the whirlwind, a captain of Blue Hussars."

His face, grown white with some suppressed emotion, gave his black eyes a notably Oriental look.

"Basil, it must be said sometime. What of the Lady of our Castle in Spain—the Good Spirit of our future? You understand me?"

I nodded assent. The crisis toward which we had been drifting had come at last. For weeks we both had known that it must so come.

Our glances met. After an instant's hesitation, combative, understanding, regretful, our hands clasped. Only the atmosphere of long, long friendship could save us. I dared not attempt to speak. In a voice a dozen years younger than his usual tones Max Revertera answered his heartbreaking question.

"Old Man, neither of us is to blame.

Neither of us . . . " He paused, reflected, began again a shade less grimly. "What is, just happened. No. Let us be frank with each other. We both loved her from the first. Whether she sees it, whether she gives either of us a serious thought, I do not know."

"Nor do I."

Max's face expressed his mood of whimsical sympathy.

"You, of all men," he said. "No, I take that back. Better you than other men. Basil, we are agreed that all is not fair in love. For us nothing remains but to wait. If she choose you, old friend, then—bless you and good luck."

I drew a strangling breath. It was like rising to the surface from an agonizing depth. His words revived a nascent hope which, for days, had been dying with pain. Huskily, less generously, I could only echo, "And if she choose you, Max, bless you and good luck."

"Good God, what's that?" Revertera

switched back to normal talk with an obvious effort.

Far off, above the hemlock forest, vultures ranging for prey from the Carpathians croaked hoarsely—the most horrid sound in nature. Almost as an echo from the Archduke's speeding wheels a sinister, insistent rumbling swept toward us—a ghostly, prophetic sound.

"Is that wind rising?" demanded Revertera.

"More like the mills of the gods, grinding slowly," I answered bitterly. Faint from dim distance we could hear the undertone of an approaching storm. Next instant the heavens moaned with a titanic wail. Max's iron grip closed on my arm.

"God, man, what can it be?"

Before I could reply the vast arch of the dark rang with shrieking as if a squadron of Valkyrie sped, screaming, into battle. Listening, I recognized that aerial warning. A boyhood spent in Bulgaria had, at least, taught me the superstitions of the Balkans.

"Max, believe it, or doubt, as you will.

That is *The Echo!* I have reined up my horse on the Iron Mountains to hear it. From Dan to Beersheba throughout the Peninsula 'the Echo' signals one warning —the clip-clop, clip-clop of Balkan cavalry mobilizing. Declare it absurd—fantastic —folklore. Granted. But the fact remains, as millions of men can testify, that inexplicable sound, rising at long intervals from the wilderness, invariably warns threatened Small Nations of a coming war!"

"Thunder and Lightning,
Thunder and Lightning,
The Russians are with us!"

repeated Revertera, his mind on the sinister significance of the rebel chant raised on the estate of the Heir Apparent. "What if the Emperor hears?"

"Old Man, there is nothing to be said. A Slavonic Austria controlled by Serbs joining forces with the Czech followers of the Duchess of Hohenberg would dominate Eastern Europe."

"Franz Ferdinand was a pompous lackwit until his marriage. Goaded by his

Scheherazade, and her thousand and one tales, he now dreams of breaking up the Dual Empire to create her Triune State. Sick and stubborn, His Highness will yet prove the maddest of all Austria's idiot archdukes. Are they all crazy?"

"No, merely crazed—crazed by the most potent poison in Creation."

"Meaning?"

"The toxin called Ambition, my son. Double distilled Ambition, which sharpens the wits, inflames the purpose, makes wrong seem justifiable."

"Do you suggest that I—"

"No, I was thinking only of the Imperials. Sophie Hohenberg would destroy our Danube Empire to create kingdoms for her two sons. Wilhelm of Hohenzollern would risk that Hell on earth, a World War, to build thrones for his six sons; the Archduchess Isabella, grasping at diadems for her six daughters, recks nothing between right and wrong."

"A royal game, win or lose. How long dare the crowned heads play it?"

"So long as the peoples will pay."

Lighting a cigarette, Revertera stared into the shadows. Waves of perfume drifted from the peaceful gardens; a strengthening breeze soughed through the swaying trees. The moon shone wanly in a cloud-wracked sky. June though it was, Max shivered slightly. Content in a companionship intimate enough for silence we hardly heard the mechanism of a swiftly approaching motor.

"Can they be returning?" inquired Revertera.

Next instant, as two imperial cars swept up to the terrace, we ran down the steps to stand again at formal salute beneath the *porte cochere*. Revertera automatically switched on the arc lights, I bowed before an unseen presence. A familiar, acrid voice called me by name from the leading motor.

"Isabella! And at her amiablest! Beware," warned Max, and retreated a pace.

The motor coughed twice or thrice and came to a full stop. I offered my arm

to a heavily veiled lady, a lean, stately princess of the red Hapsburg type. Tall, splendidly proportioned, gowned in a nut brown travelling costume of military severity, Her Highness, the Archduchess Isabella, ascended with my assistance to the terrace.

"Am I in time?" she demanded imperiously.

"His Imperial Highness and the Duchess left us within the hour, Madam."

"Prince Montenuovo is still here?"

"Monseigneur has also gone—to Vienna."

"Or, perhaps, to Serajevo," she did me the honor to intimate, her mocking eyes challenging me through her veil.

In silence we passed down the Long Gallery and entered the only apartment still lighted—the military cabinet.

"What room is this?" demanded the Archduchess, looking about the paneled walls.

"His Imperial Highness's study, Madam. If your Highness will be good enough to

be seated, Count Revertera has gone to summon a lady of the palace to attend Your Highness."

"The Crown Prince's study," repeated the Princess, scrutinizing her surroundings. "What an interesting atmosphere. All his papers here, of course. Secrets of national importance, we may assume. This, then, is the room in which my nephew works out his plans for new manoeuvres?"

Denial was worse than useless. I bowed.

A footman on night service, sent us by Revertera, slipped in with a bubbling cylix, lit the spirit lamp, bowed and disappeared. I watched his exit, undecided. If only a lady-in-waiting were available to do the honors. What was detaining Mademoiselle? Even were she to appear *en deshabille* . . .

The Archduchess, apparently awkward from fatigue, attempted to discard her wraps. Aware that her Highness had made a decalogue of the petty decorums of the Court I hesitated, then offered my clumsy assistance. Her Highness was gra-

ciously pleased to reward me with an exquisitely artificial smile. Weary and wind-blown, she was still unmistakably *grande dame.*

"I know that I can depend upon you, Count Badani. You are no fair weather friend," she told me with a suppliant air. "I come from His Apostolic Majesty—and arrive too late! Kaiser Franz knows that Wilhelm of Hohenzollern has been here to draft a pact. That pact, the Emperor fears, has tempted my nephew and—and the *herzogin* of Hohenberg, into danger. His Majesty wishes me to learn without delay if the Archduke filed that pact of Konopist here, in his military cabinet, or carried it, under his silken armor, to Serajevo."

Her glance bored through my frail reserve. What should I say? What could I say? The aged Autocrat, mentally enfeebled as we of the entourage knew him to be, was notoriously controlled by a petticoat *camarilla.* If the phantom Emperor had actually commissioned his clever

cousin to discover his heir's state secret, rebuff by me would promptly end my public career. I tried to analyze the face turned suavely toward me. It was a typical Croy face, arrogant and ambitious, but not, as I read it, *intrigante.* And yet, it was the daughter of this relentless lady, the Archduchess Gabrielle, loveliest of six charming sisters, whom the Countess von Chotek had supplanted in the Heir Apparent's affections.

Suppose that Her Serene Highness, inspired by animus, planned an intrigue against her *ci-devant dame d'honneur?* All the world knows that a woman with brains can teach the Devil revenge. Suppose, even . . .

"Count Badani, I am waiting," warned the Archduchess Isabella.

I drew a long breath. Survive or perish, I must reply.

"Your Serene Highness . . . " I paused. We were no longer alone. Revertera stood in the corridor at admiring salute, one hand absent-mindedly holding

the jade handle of the richly gilded door. A lady in ceremonious costume entered swiftly and swept down in a great curtsy. For a moment I did not know her. A court beauty, lithe, graceful, stately, exquisitely dressed from her small buckled shoe to the meshes of soft brown hair caught back with artful simplicity.

"Your Serene Highness will deign to pardon me," we heard Mademoiselle Stapleton's voice murmur submissively as she made obeisance and kissed the Princess's extended hand. "I—I had retired when Your Highness arrived." Eyes bright with pleasurable excitement, cheeks pink as a waking child's, her youth against the elder's fading charms, her vivid personality against artificial restraint, it was woman against woman, each instantly aware of the test.

"Your Highness will permit me to conduct Her to an apartment?"

"No, no, my child, it is impossible—in this house."

A look conveyed the explanation, lin-

gered with the appraisement of a connoisseur on the stately gown so obviously assumed in her honor. Mademoiselle Stapleton's manner was perfect; loyal to our Duchess, respectfully appreciative of the decision. Fear stabbed me lest the courageous girl be snared in a battle of wits by that implacable arch-dame. Revertera, rigidly correct in attitude, a quizzical look in his hard black eyes, smiled interested amusement as if watching a play.

Mademoiselle laid aside the long white gloves which seem to be the chief necessity of a lady's life at Court and took the liberty to question our visitor.

"Your Highness permits me to offer refreshments?"

"Only a *cafe noir*, my child."

Again that descriptive designation. Mademoiselle's slight figure assumed, perhaps unconsciously, an *ingenue* attitude. From the sylex table she brought coffee and, ignoring the Captain of Blue Hussars, offered it to me for formal presentation to the imperial guest. Her new air of aloof-

ness subtly indicated our relative positions in the Archduke's confidence. The Duchess Isabella, keenly observant of social forms, accepted my service with a more personal appreciation.

Accustomed to the stiff Austrian etiquette of the Hapsburgs, we attended with due deference while the great lady sipped her coffee with imperial unconcern. Presently Her Serene Highness was pleased to address us.

"Which of you can tell me," she asked, scorn in her voice, "how long the *Herzogin* of Hohenberg intends to remain in Bosnia?"

Mademoiselle's grave glance called on Revertera to reply. He laughed lightly, in courtier fashion, feinting and fencing with a well matched antagonist.

"*Helas!* Serene Highness, we *automata* of the Household learn little of our master's intentions."

"Count Badani?" probed the Archduchess.

Before I could bow and reply Mademoi-

selle Stapleton curtsied and interrupted. "Your Imperial Highness, I have been told. It is for Your Highness to judge if I should repeat, since I am in the service of the Duchess."

The Archduchess Isabella allowed us to understand that she was not displeased by such evidence of loyalty. Her shrewd glance rested with a thoughtfulness almost respectful on the young, cheerful face.

I turned from Mademoiselle, sick at heart. Her unsmiling aloofness, her almost brusque refusal to permit me to reply to a dangerous question, could indicate only one thing—distrust. When her glance challenged Revertera to answer the Archduchess, warning spoke from her brown eyes; warning, almost fear, for whom? The quick-witted girl, always half amused, half puzzled by the swirling intrigues of an imperial court, had, overnight, become a woman, protective, maternal, tense to defend from possible peril some one grown dear to her. It had not before occurred to me that Mademoiselle Stapleton might

have come to love the self-centered Duchess of Hohenberg. A second suspicion stabbed me. Could it be Max Revertera?

The Archduchess surrendered her empty *demi-tasse* with a gracious word. Mademoiselle deftly kicked her long train behind her and withdrew, walking backward, of course, to the cylix table. I caught the girlishly grateful look with which she acknowledged Revertera's practiced assistance. Their low voices exchanging idle pleasantries, his undisguised admiration, her frank friendliness—refreshing as a breath of thyme in a sultry atmosphere—obviously intrigued the most intrepid matchmaker in Europe. The Princess, magnificent and royal, her mind full of darkness and mystery, looked at them abstractedly.

"They are, as Your Highness is gracious enough to observe, very good friends," I ventured to comment. "Indeed, I begin to suspect . . . " my voice sounded flat in my ears.

The imperial eye spoke volumes with a

look. I was honored by a smile at once superior, sincere, almost sympathetic.

"Are you quite, quite blind, Count Badani?" inquired the Archduchess Isabella.

That challenge confirmed my nascent fear. Of all living women the mentor of the Viennese Court would be the first to detect a dawning love interest. Next instant, as if regretful of a momentary weakness, the royal lady's voice assumed its archducal tone. With full measure of Hapsburg arrogance she stated her will to be alone.

"Gentlemen, I shall not detain you further."

Revertera and I received Her Highness's commands with submission and retired, carefully throwing open both wings of the wide folding door. Obviously we could not leave so dangerous an Arch-Dame unwatched in His Highness's study. Therefore we took up a strategic position in the Long Gallery.

Directly we had withdrawn, Mademoiselle Stapleton, apparently hoping to check-

mate further inquisition, crossed the military cabinet and raised a red velvet portiere emblazoned with the arms of the House of Este that masked the entrance to an inner chamber.

"Since Your Highness prefers not to rest upstairs," she explained, "this is a withdrawing room."

"You are right, my child; I am both weary and dishevelled. I shall ring when I need you."

The heavy curtain fell behind her.

Alone in the military cabinet we saw Mademoiselle Stapleton's face become anxious. The messenger more dangerous than Montenuovo would not, we all knew, willingly return empty handed to Schonbrunn. She would search until she found what she sought. Mademoiselle, finger on lip, inspected the Archduke's table. There, half hidden in the litter of papers, lay the imperial order. With a quick look toward the portieres she picked up the blue envelope to study seal and superscription. A dawning smile brightened her piquant face.

Slowly, cautiously, she opened the table drawer, and found what she had herself hidden—the black fan.

There was not a moment to lose. Mademoiselle placed the blue envelope in the table drawer, noiselessly turned the lock and dropped the key upon the carpet. Smiling and holding the fan half hidden, she looked about the masculine room for a second hiding place. Naked paneling, austere furnishings—not a nook or cranny. Her nervous fingers opened and shut the fan sticks. Something resisted. She looked down and caught a glimpse of a fold of initialed parchment. One glance, and her woman's brain comprehended—the German Emperor had made some promise in writing. Franz Ferdinand, finding Her Highness's fan in his work table, had used it to conceal that written promise.

Discovery of the paper might endanger his position, prove disastrous to the safety of the Duchess, even threaten the future of the children. She dare not carry such a document from the Hereditary Archduke's

room. It was too late to return it to the writing table.

Even we, in the Long Gallery, could hear from behind the portieres that Her Serene Highness was moving about. Mademoiselle Stapleton became tense as she listened. Then, closing the fan with a resolute little gesture, she laid it in full sight on the center table. Next moment, with a ceremonious curtsy toward the closed curtains, she slipped past us into the Winter Garden.

* * *

Within the withdrawing room a bell tinkled, faintly. No one responded. With a sibilant swish one of the long portieres swung back slightly and the Archduchess Isabella stepped into the study. Her keen eyes inspected the bare, but stately apartment; her testing fingers tapped the nearest paneling. Audacious and determined she sauntered round the towering columns until her tour brought her to the geographical globe. A casual glance revealed the significant red line drawn by the boy

princes under the German Emperor's tutelage.

"From Revel, on the Baltic . . . Across Western Russia to Kalisz . . . Then North again by Thorn, through German Poland . . . To the sea. Enclosing German Austria with the German Confederation . . . The Hereditary Provinces of the Most August Family."

In an instant she understood! The coming monarch of the Dual Empire scheming to give Hapsburg Family property in return for a commercial corridor to the Baltic! Great Poland of the Jagellons restored; the recrudescence of that turbulent medieval State. Hapsburg Crown Lands surrendered to the Hapsburgs' old enemy, Prussia, for the benefit of *Die* Chotek's son!

She bent above the geographical globe. A second frontier, cutting Slavic Austria from the Dual Empire, enclosing it with the Slav Lands of the Balkan Peninsula! Two new thrones! It remained only to discover some proof of this iniquitous plan.

Without proof no one would believe such an accusation made against the Austrian Crown Prince. The angry eyes of the Archduchess searched the splendid room, returning, finally, to the center table. There lay a black fan, *the* black fan which she had sent to Konopist by Prince Montenuovo. Instinctively she stretched out her hand to take it, then drew back, dusting her fingers as if they felt soiled. We heard her grim voice muttering, "Great Poland of the Jagellons; the long threatened State of Jugo-Slavia; the pan-Slav dream made real." Knowing the Archduchess we could follow her thought.

The pan-Slav plot made real unless she, Isabella of Hapsburg, dare prevent it. Not for the first time had Isabella of Hapsburg matched wits with Wilhelm of Hohenzollern, but always before he had won. Was it not he, *Der Einzige, the* "Only One," who influenced the old Emperor Franz Joseph to permit Franz Ferdinand's morganatic marriage? Was it not he, *Der Einzige,* who secured for Sophie Chotek her treas-

ured title of Duchess? Assuredly it was he who had schemed to create new thrones for two nameless boys at whatever cost to the Hapsburg Family. And all that he might make himself suzerain of Central Europe! The red line on the map proved the gigantic plot. There was a pact, newly made, guarded as a State secret. Now to find it! It might be, nay, it must be, in Franz Ferdinand's study.

Her Serene Highness, turning slowly to examine her surroundings, caught sight of a key lying on the carpet. In another moment she had the table drawer open and the imperial blue envelope in her hand.

Dated yesterday, marked *Private*, closed by Franz Ferdinand's seal as Heir Apparent, signed with his hereditary title Austria-d'Este, there could be but one explanation. This was the pact of Konopist.

In the long corridor Revertera and I heard the Archduke's desk bell ring sharply. When we followed Mademoiselle Stapleton into the room Her Serene Highness sat in state by the center table.

"My wraps, child," she bade Mademoiselle; and to Revertera, "my motor. Having missed my nephew I shall return at once to Schonbrunn. We shall see what we shall see. Count Badani, your arm."

With impressive ceremony we all escorted the departing guest to the *porte cochere*. What Max murmured while the motors for the Archduchess and her travelling entourage purred and sped away does not bear repetition.

As we mounted the stone steps to the terrace Max and I observed that Mademoiselle, walking between us, very splendid and stately, seemed decidedly *distrait*.

"What is troubling you, Mademoiselle?" I ventured.

"My conscience," she admitted humbly. "When Count Revertera summoned me to attend the Archduchess I should have offered a prayer, but—but I forgot." Max's lips twitched as his glance met mine above her bent head.

"Dare I ask what caused you to forget?"

he inquired with a significant glance at her toilette of ceremony.

Her air of whimsical contrition was charming.

"If you really want to know," confessed Mademoiselle, "I forgot because I was wondering how St. Catherine of Sienna would 'tackle' the Archduchess Isabella."

With a quick return to her frank and joyous air Mademoiselle Stapleton led the way into the military cabinet, crossed the wide floor to the writing table, picked a key from the carpet and unlocked the center drawer.

"The blue envelope is gone," she told us, speaking as one who finds the expected.

Gravely, almost fearfully, she walked to the center table and lifted the black fan. As she played with it for an instant Revertera and I both saw that the feathers concealed the strip of initialed parchment we had seen last in the Archduke's hand.

Mademoiselle looked at me a little shyly as if deferring to my executive position in the household.

"This," she said gently, "should be found by His Imperial Highness where he left it." She laid the black fan in the writing table and slowly locked the drawer.

"The Prince's Pact!" gasped Revertera. "Unconcealed, unguarded, within easy reach of the Most Implacable Family!"

I looked at the girlish face now turned from me. Relief for her safety, relief too exquisite for words, held me dumb. But Revertera's wits still worked. Courtier-like he stood beside her, clicking spurred heels as he bent above her reluctant hand.

"Mademoiselle," and even his usually mocking voice was not quite steady, "Badani has told me of your merry boast that 'any woman can outwit a mere man.' Tomorrow I go to Serajevo remembering that 'it takes a really clever girl to outwit another woman'."

CHAPTER VI

The Handwriting on the Wall

1

"Mene, Mene . . ."

And now what might be called the weft of my tale—of which I, Badani, was no eyewitness but which was told me by my old friend, Chief Adjutant Count Parr—is recorded with this assurance: Count Parr, member of the Imperial Household for half a century, of noble blood and of keener, cleaner wit than 'the Assassin,' would *know* what went on in the Emperor's Palace. Yes, assuredly old Count Parr would know.

In the Emperor's palace on the Ausgarten, the Controller of the Imperial Household was acting for the Sovereign. For days stretching into weeks Prince Montenuovo had spent all his waking hours on

guard in the anteroom of the old Monarch's study.

Above the strategic spot where he stood to receive his guests Monseigneur had caused to be placed a portrait of the Archduchess Marie Louise, heartless, vain, *intrigante*, to overlook her grandson's scheming. Facing the prince, as he manoeuvred the pawns in his great game, a painting of that grandmother's first husband—one Napoleon Bonaparte—faced his psuedo descendant. On a conspicuous table of crystal and gilded bronze—a treasure of First Empire artistry—a gold bowl filled with Napoleon violets subtly scented the room and focused attention on an easel picture of *"L'Aiglon."*

"My little Uncle," His Highness would explain with a deprecating gesture to an obviously observant visitor. The atmosphere thus created was potent. Grandson of an Emperor's widow, nephew to the tragic King of Rome, few men in the diplomatic or political world dare question Montenuovo's decisions.

The British Ambassador stared from one portrait to the other while he pondered the Grand Chamberlain's bland refusal to arrange the audience he sought.

"By order of the Emperor," Monseigneur explained suavely.

His Excellency saluted the phantom of royalty.

"But I wish to impart important information to His Imperial and Royal Majesty," he urged.

Prince Montenuovo glanced across the salon to the emblazoned folding doors of the old ruler's study.

"Possibly if Your Excellency felt able to confide in me . . ." he temporized.

"Your Highness, I wish to report to His Majesty personally, if possible. My recent information indicates grave danger threatening the Archduke Franz Ferdinand from —from Hungary."

The Grand Chamberlain's darting glance concentrated on the crystal chandelier.

"Is Your Excellency surprised?"

"I fear that I fail to follow, Your Highness."

"Tut, tut! Friends may speak frankly. Franz Ferdinand's hatred of Hungary is the red thread of his political policy. He has systematically cursed all the Magyar *colossi.* He plans incessantly how he may break the Kingdom of St. Stephen into five crippled parts. Your Excellency appreciates that I speak in confidence."

The British Ambassador bowed his pleasure.

"If an indiscretion be permitted 'between friends,' Monseigneur, I fear that the Magyars will not soon forget the Crown Prince's bitter jibe concerning their poor taste in coming out of Asia into Europe."

"Your Excellency judges rightly, as usual. The passing of His Imperial Highness—which Heaven forfend—would free Budapest of an incubus; make Stephen Tisza dictator of the Dual Empire. You realize, as some of Your Excellency's colleagues do not, that the 'Cromwell of

Hungary' would risk a world war to secure the independence of his country."

"Which makes more important my early audience with the Emperor. Still, if His Imperial and Royal Majesty is too much occupied to-day . . ."

"Ah, I felt certain that Your Excellency would understand. Our splendid old Master observed only yesterday, 'We may always trust the representatives of the Great Powers to realize our situation. It is only the typical Balkan self-seekers who push themselves forward'."

The Ambassador of one Great Power thawed perceptibly. "Then I leave this document in your care, Prince. We are, I assume, agreed that the interests of Europe demand peace at any cost. That to-day the peace of Europe rests on a scrap of paper."

"Another epigram!" expostulated the Lord High Chamberlain with his courtier-like assumption of mirth, bowing his unwelcome visitor into the corridor. A moment later a bemedaled chasseur stepped

across the threshold, saluting with a rattle of sabre and clash of spurs as he announced sonorously:

"His Excellency, Count Stephen Tisza."

The appearance of the newcomer banished Montenuovo's official smile. His manner became frosty and less ceremonious. A slight, wiry man entered the reception room. Born in the political purple the Magyar Premier had little sympathy, and less use, for men of Montenuovo's ancestry.

The Prince wasted no time on the customary courtesies.

"Well, Count?"

"I desire an immediate audience with the King of Hungary."

"It is impossible to-day."

"When will His Majesty receive me?"

"Assuredly at his earliest leisure."

"It is weeks since our King has been seen by his entourage—since you shut the gates of Schonbrunn against the officials of the Empire."

"Possibly. These things must be ex-

pected. When an Emperor-King reaches our August Monarch's great age fluctuations in the imperial health are inevitable!"

The Iron Count of Hungary, who dreamed of being the Iron Chancellor of the Danube Empire, considered his position. His contemptuous glance followed the figure of the Emperor's Controller as he moved, with mincing steps, about the anteroom.

"I am here," announced Count Tisza grimly, "to register a protest—more, a warning! The Heir of Austria-Hungary risks his life by attending great manoeuvres."

"You think so?" All Montenuovo's characteristic distrust of human motives edged the question.

"I know it."

"But His Highness is notoriously pro-Slav. No Bosnian . . ."

"What of Bosnia's big ally, Russia? Franz Ferdinand's hatred of Russia is notorious. St. Petersburg recognizes the Archduke as Russia's only real rival in the

Balkans. The Czar imagines that the 'disappearance' of His Imperial Highness would insure the peace of Europe."

"Count, should this week's military manoeuvres prove an historic provocation it is of record that *you* advised our Crown Prince to attend!"

"Then add to the record that I now warn the Heir Apparent of Austria-Hungary not to go to Serajevo."

With that last word the Blood-and-Iron ruler of Hungary, so soon to fall dead on the threshold of his titanic dream, flung out of the *salle d'honneur*. As he disappeared an aristocratic figure in stately ecclesiastical court dress swept through the doorway unannounced—Mother Superior's brother, the bishop—entering briskly, with that soldierly stride which instantly proclaimed him a former officer of Hussars.

The Prince of Montenuovo, with his chameleon-like response to his surroundings, advanced to salute that member of the Hierarchy who was recognized at the Court of Austria as, in a special way, the

Pope's representative. Greeted by a look half combative, half contemptuous, he sought safety in platitudes. "Allow me to express my pleasure on Your Lordship's return. Your Lordship has, doubtless, been to Rome."

"No, Prince, to Ireland, to visit Margaret."

Montenuovo winced as he responded.

"Your sister is well, I trust, and . . . and happy."

"My sister is, at least, well content, and peaceful."

"It is still tragic to think that her intelligence, her charm, are forever buried in a cloister."

"Buried only as sowers bury wheat, Prince. To-day Margaret lives absorbed in her chosen work—the training of the modern woman for her increasing opportunities."

"Had the Countess Margaret not lost courage—had she remained at Court—she would to-day wield as much influence as—as does the 'Chotek Cinderella.' "

The bishop's tone and manner took on a military curtness.

"Say, rather, had my sister Margaret not fallen foul of a political plotter who enlisted her girlish ignorance to assist his court intrigue she would not have fled in fear and dismay a world she could not understand. Rest assured, Prince, that none of Margaret's pupils will live to suffer in like fashion. It would be drama, would it not, were one of them astute enough to outwit the crafty schemer who, for his own ends, warped my sister's life?" The Grand Chamberlain, a fleck of color rising in his sagging cheek, avoided the other's accusing eyes.

"Your Lordship's voice assumes a tone more familiar when you were Captain of the Guard Hussars—if I dare recall those days," he conciliated.

"Why not? You may even add that I was a fairly efficient captain of Hussars. We must all live through the storm and stress of youth. I thank heaven that my

youth was spent in the guards' room of a palace and not on the back stairs."

The Lord High Chamberlain edged away from the precipice of an open quarrel. Apropos of nothing he remarked, "Your Grace has doubtless heard that the Archduke Franz, and his Duchess, are en route to Bosnia. I fear . . ."

The Pope's representative swept aside euphemisms. "You know that they will probably be attacked. I anticipate that the Duchess will be killed. Were she to live she would change the map of Europe. Sophie von Chotek is a woman of virtuous conduct and of fine ideals. Motherhood made her intrepid; she became dangerous when the Imperial Family sought to hamper her children. No power can cope with a woman willing to risk her life. 'Forsake all, and thou shalt find all'."

"You think that?" questioned Montenuovo politely.

"I do. But Thomas of Kempis thought it first. When old age descends upon me I shall employ its enforced leisure by study-

ing the influence of women on the history of our time—I mean of quite unknown women — self-forgetting wives, for instance; certain other females; and more especially, gifted teachers."

Suspicion almost surly darkened Montenuovo's face. "I learned recently of a young woman who seems to have been trained for special service in an archducal palace," he observed gloomily.

"At Konopist?" inquired the bishop, blandly.

"At Konopist."

Fun sparkled in the ecclesiastical eye.

"Did she," probed the bishop suavely, "did she mention St. Catherine of Sienna?"

"Catherine of Sienna? The saint who lived in the fourteenth—or was it in the sixteenth century? What has Catherine of Sienna to do with us?"

"I begin to wonder," admitted the prelate.

"Who is this young woman?" demanded the Controller of the Imperial Household.

"Mademoiselle's charming name is Car-

mel. One does not often see such lovely Irish eyes," quoted the Bishop.

"Who sent her to Konopist?"

"*I* did."

"Who trained her for the work she is doing there?"

"Margaret."

Each measured the other as fencers who fall apart.

"*Touche!*" murmured the prelate and made the classic salute to a fallen antagonist as if the hand wearing his episcopal ring held a foil.

The Emperor's Chamberlain gulped down his chagrin.

"I venture to express my surprise that Countess Margaret—I crave your Lordship's pardon; I mean Your Lordship's sister, the Mother Superior—would permit one of her pupils to return alone to the Court from which she fled."

The bishop's tone again became incisive. "Margaret asked only to be reassured concerning the character of the Archduke's aides-de-camp."

"Your Lordship was able to give the necessary assurance?"

"I was. You must grant that I am a fair judge, having myself been an imperial adjutant. I met both Badani and Revertera at Great Manoeuvres."

"Your Lordship attends Great Manoeuvres?"

"Why not? Especially when I could not bear to stay away. We all have a pet weakness, Prince. But, since you seem interested in this subject, I know Badani and Revertera to be honorable, decent fellows, not over intellectual, perhaps, but trustworthy, kindly, of Damon and Pythias loyalty. Royal aides-de-camp, to be all their masters demand, needs must be saints. Speaking from experience, I have met few saints at Court. Badani, to his credit, is the home-staying, marrying kind. I like him enough to hope that he wins a lady-wife more intellectually clever than himself. Revertera I cannot judge impartially, he being a brother from my old regiment. But if I know men, Max Revertera is the knight-

errant type, a man born to do one big thing. Such men meet their opportunity in war. In these days of peace I could wish—but he would find the theology a stiff task."

He smiled his large, tolerant smile.

Quick to seize a possible opportunity for conciliation, the Grand Chamberlain assumed a contrite attitude.

"This interview touches me shrewdly," he confessed. "It recalls lost friends, dead hopes. Fate has made me an Ishmael, unloved, unloving . . ."

The bishop refused to be placated.

"I instinctively suspect the man who boasts that there is nothing he loves. For myself, I have a dog at home. He is not, as strangers see him, a very valuable dog. But there are moments when his head thrust under my hand . . . Possibly you would find a cat companionable."

His Highness of Montenuovo countered, "There is something so specially ecclesiastical about a cat. Richelieu, you remember . . ."

The bishop smiled wryly as his ringed hand made a gesture of admission.

Again the Emperor's Chamberlain sought to conciliate.

"Your Lordship desires an audience with His Imperial Majesty?"

"It is always a joy to see His *Apostolic* Majesty."

"That 'joy' is mutual, Your Lordship, but to-day, alas . . ."

"I do not recall, Prince, that I requested an audience for to-day."

"His Imperial and Apostolic Majesty is, as Your Lordship may imagine, overburdened with work."

"When a monarch is eighty-four, Monseigneur, even nominal work may prove a burden. Imperial and simple, age claims us all at the end. A touch of *malaise;* a natural toxin in the blood stream; the mere pressure of a thumb on the thyroid—and our boasted mentality disappears. Even age-worn pontiffs have 'ruled' from the Vatican, signing, under skilful suggestion, on the dotted line."

The mild eye of the Pope's representative considered the Controller of the Imperial Household.

"Your Lordship will doubtless recall," purred the Grand Chamberlain, "that our Most August and Autocratic Master, feeling himself less—shall I venture to suggest —less strong than heretofore, appealed to the Father of Christendom for spiritual support. And to the surprise and dismay of the Court . . ."

The bishop interrupted, crisp and explicit.

"Why this circumlocution, Prince? We know, the Hierarchy know, all the important nobles know, that His Majesty, realizing that his death approaches, pleaded with the Sovereign Pontiff for spiritual and political support in the event of the continental war which his tortuous policy has, at long last, rendered probable. In reply he was sternly admonished that the Pope, whom he did not consult when war plotting with Wilhelm of Hohenzollern, refused to be made a cat's-paw when their

militant schemes went wrong. Therefore Pius the Tenth bade Franz Joseph examine his conscience in relation to his moral responsibility in contemplating another preventable war."

An impressive silence followed, broken, finally, by Montenuovo's submissive, "How may I have the honor to serve Your Lordship?"

"By at once notifying the Great Headquarters Staff that the life of the Heir Apparent is to-day in imminent peril."

"Your Lordship, you astound me!"

The bishop's thoughtful gaze concentrated on the Grand Chamberlain's fox-like face.

"Were you equally 'astounded' by the warning of the British Ambassador, and the disclosures of the Hungarian Premier?"

Montenuovo, never non-plused, affected to consider the question.

"I will, if you please, dictate what I wish to say," continued the papal diplomat. Seating himself with a sacerdotal sweep of his silken robes he apparently failed to ob-

serve that His Highness of Montenuovo, note book in hand, remained standing.

"The text is this: One moment, I shall initial the paper." He wrote a military looking signature at the top of the sheet.

"To resume: His Imperial Highness has been led into a trap set for him at Serajevo. He must be warned at once. Germany has everything to gain, nothing to lose, by the assassination of the Archduke. The Prussians hope that Austria is breaking up. The German Emperor, racing toward the redistribution of the earth, seeks to establish the Hohenzollern headship of Germanic Europe. Accustomed to flattering our aged Emperor into acquiescence, Wilhelm Second desires at the Hofburg an heir like the Archduke Carl, immature, untrained, clay in the potter's hands. Between the Monarch-Who-Was and the Monarch-Who-Is-To-Be stands Franz Ferdinand, strong, stubborn, a prince who is slowly building up Austria's independence of Prussia. In the Archduke's reorganized Empire Germans and Magyars will ulti-

mately become a weak minority. Berlin's plans from the Baltic to Bagdad demand a pliant tool at Vienna. The Archduke is neither. Were he dead, no living Hapsburg could take his place. Who induces the Heir Apparent to venture into the anarchy of a Slav province? Who tempted him to make a triumphal entry into a conquered Slav capital, on *Vivo Don*, a Slavic national holiday held holy for five hundred years?"

"Stephen Tisza."

"That pro-German Calvinist? The most implacable enemy Slavdom ever knew?"

"Your Lordship describes him."

"Then Rome was not mistaken!"

The Prince of Montenuovo, having finished writing the dictation, respectfully handed his pen to the bishop, who again initialed the paper close beneath the last line.

"Your Lordship wishes this statement brought to the attention of His Apostolic Majesty?"

"No!" his lordship contradicted with

cold conciseness. "His Holiness, the Supreme Pontiff, concerned for the safety of the prince who is to-day the Eldest Son of the Church, demands, through me, that this warning be transmitted at once—at once, you understand—to Field Marshal Potierek, commanding the Army at Serajevo."

His Highness made a final effort to reach a friendlier footing.

"I humbly commend my sinful self to Your Lordship," moving as if to kiss the episcopal ring.

The bishop's face became stern. "As a theologian, Montenuovo, I know that there can be no hope of forgiveness until there is a firm purpose of amendment. Remember this: Persistence in deadly sin spells damnation! But, have no fear that I shall forget you. During these trying days you are quite constantly in my thoughts."

Without another word, either of courtesy or benediction, the Pope's representative swept from the room.

The Prince of Montenuovo watched his departure with gloomy satisfaction.

2

"Tekel . . ."

"Hungary . . . Russia . . . Germany . . . There is trouble in the air! If coming events cast their shadow, we are on the eve of the old Emperor's 'Thirteenth Tragedy.' Ah," his brow cleared. Her Imperial Highness, the Archduchess Isabella, stood in the doorway, her face radiant.

Next instant the Grand Chamberlain was bowing above her graciously extended hand, saying, *sotto voce,* "At Your Serene Highness's command."

"What news, Prince?" the arrogant eyes smiled success.

"The Double Headed Eagles are seeking their prey.'

"From which do you hear?"

"From all three—Hungary, Russia, Germany. First, the British Ambassador. He warns us that the life of Austria's Crown Prince is threatened—by Hungary."

"Is a British Ambassador useful, beautiful, or merely an interesting relic?"

He led her ceremoniously to an armchair.

"Highness, he is Europe's costliest anachronism—a walking delegate of diplomacy."

"Next, you heard from—?"

"From Hungary's prime minister, who, like Bismarck in his later period, has grown to be an over-proud and obstreperous servant. He announced that our Heir Presumptive is threatened with assassination—by the Russians."

"A fact not unsuspected since Rudolph's day."

"Finally, from him whom we call 'The Nuncie.' He dictated a declaration that the Archduke is in danger of death—from the Germans!"

"Dictated? For Kaiser Franz?"

"No, Your Highness; for the Field Marshal in charge of great manoeuvres."

The Archduchess folded a Hapsburg lip between finger and thumb.

"Ah, a past master among tyros. The Vatican was training diplomats when England and Russia and Germany were grub-

bing for acorns." The Archduchess dismissed Magyar, Muscovite and Briton with a gesture of amused contempt.

"Now for my news!" She assumed an air of triumph.

"Prince, while you were at Konopist, did you observe a geographical globe in my nephew's study?"

"Not particularly, Your Highness, why should I?"

"Because it offered the evidence we sought."

"Sought?" His raised brows demanded explanation.

"Sought," reiterated the Princess with finality. "On that globe I discovered *her* plan—a plan outlined in blood red. Great Poland of the Jagellons. Worse—worse, a United States of Slavdom! *Es ist verbrecken das Deutschtum*—it is a crime against Germanism! Those lines on the globe prove a pact, a written pact. Alone in the Archduke's study I searched until I found—*this!*" She snatched the blue en-

velope from her jeweled bag and laid it on the table.

Montenuovo, with his look of a fox, took a mincing step forward, fumbled for his monocle and bowed his fat back to study the treasure trove.

"Your Imperial Highness assumes this to be—?"

"The pact made at Konopist, of course."

"With Your Imperial Highness's permission."

He picked up the blue envelope to study seal and superscription.

"Clever, very clever," he commented, "but I fear we have been outwitted. To cut a seal—an Imperial seal—is, well, not legal. Still, like many imperative acts, if they may be successfully concealed, it can be held justifiable. We must learn what this cover contains before submitting its contents to the Emperor. The wise of our world know that necessity scorns all law."

Heating a penknife in a candle flame he held it, with practiced skill, against the wax.

"If this be not the Pact of Konopist, then what is it?" demanded the Archduchess, dawning fear in her voice.

The Lord High Chamberlain, his nefarious task accomplished, opened the blue envelope, withdrew and presented a folded paper.

"It is, I fear, the Imperial Order forbidding Franz Ferdinand's journey into Bosnia."

A glance convinced Her Highness.

"No man did that," she commented wryly. "It takes a woman to hide what she hopes that a woman will find."

Through the silence an old, old man's throat-clearing cough rasped unpleasantly. Both faces turned with a listening look toward the gorgeously ornamented double door.

"*Der Alter Herr,*" whispered the Archduchess with a gesture of despair, "and this document is useless to convince him."

The Emperor's ferret picked up the blue envelope with a superior smile. "Highness, it may, however, serve to infuriate him.

In our second childhood, as in our first, we feel more shrewdly than we think."

A strident bell rang angrily.

"One moment, Prince. Elements dangerous to the Heir Apparent are converging on Serajevo. What do you plan to do?"

"Nothing."

"Will our political police receive no instructions from Vienna?"

"None."

"There are moments when silence becomes an unpardonable sin."

"There are also moments, Imperial Highness, when the ultimate revenge is inaction."

"Terrible, but true. If Franz Ferdinand lives to inherit the Imperial Crown we shall all be in *her* power."

"And remember, it is written, 'Hell hath no fury—' "

"That phrase, Prince, is a two-edged sword. If *she* reigns, the princely House of Montenuovo—"

"Will follow the Imperial House of Hapsburg into a long retirement."

Two pairs of implacable eyes confessed a common hatred. The Lord High Chamberlain was the first to speak.

"In the course of human events the fate of thousands, even of millions, sometimes rests with one man. That man, prepared to meet the test, straightway steps into history." Perhaps unconsciously he assumed the attitude of reflective leadership; feet wide, hands clasped behind. So the First Napoleon stood awaiting the sun of Austerlitz.

The Archduchess indulged a genuine feminine shudder. "Sometimes, Monseigneur, such a man steps into infamy." From the inner room a thin, old voice called querulously.

"*Der Alter Herr!*" said His Highness, and summoning a footman to open both sides of the mighty gilded door, stood aside with a courtly bow. The Archduchess Isabella preceded him into the Emperor's study.

3

"Upharsin"

In that large and lofty room the walls were covered with antique damask; the long hangings about the high windows held back by silver shields bearing elaborate heraldic escutcheons. The time-mellowed silks, superb and graceful, subtly recalled the splendid court of the Sun King. Opposite the door of entrance an immense black marble mantelpiece towered to the painted Olympus which glorified the domed ceiling. Summer though it was, a homely tiled wood stove stood burning on the vast hearth before which immense folding screens covered with splendid tapestries had been arranged to extemporize a *sanctum sanctorum.*

At one corner of this enclosed space a gigantic black marble figure of Time, designed to support the wide mantel shelf, held a clock from which his shining scythe swept away the waning minutes of each dying hour. In the corner opposite a wonderful *boule* chest was covered with awe-

some pictures of dead Hapsburgs standing in their coffins, clad in their shrouds; the classic *Sterbekommode* of Catholic courts advocated by stern spiritual directors for the private apartments of those pseudo penitents who, having ill-used life, slowly approach a yet unprepared-for death: "Dust thou art, and unto dust . . ."

Between these grim *Memento Mori*, wrapped in a well worn military cloak, the *Kaiser von Oesterreich*, Lord of the Eastern Realm, sat near a writing table. His palsied hands, crossed on the handle of a cane, supported his chewing jaws. A deaf mute of the Imperial apartment, waiting, napkin in hand, occasionally wiped moisture from the drooling mouth.

Before that living statue of senility the Archduchess Isabella swept down in a deep curtsy. The wreck of a man graciously extended a talon-like hand to be kissed. The Archduchess reverently carried out the prescribed etiquette, murmuring, as if at prayer, "Your Imperial and Royal Majesty."

The lack-luster eyes turned toward her dreamily, wholly passive.

"I come from Konopist."

"Konopist?" The tired memory groped for explanation.

"From Franz Ferdinand, your heir, your brother, Charles-Louis' son."

"Ah." The weary mind waked slowly, a quizzical smile wrinkled the age worn face.

"Does *she*, Franz Ferdinand's Sophie, grow more like my masterful mother—my mother, who, alone, unaided, raised me to my uncle's throne?"

"Your Imperial Majesty, *Die Chotek* has led Franz Ferdinand into the heart of Slavdom. There they will be acclaimed, to-day, together."

The nodding head approved. "Shrewd. Very shrewd. My Lady Mother might have planned that," mused the old monarch.

The Archduchess received His Majesty's reflections with all submissive respect.

"Your Imperial Majesty," ventured the

Controller of the Imperial Household, "Serajevo is the center of insurrection. The fate of the Heir Presumptive . . ."

Lucidity flashed into the cynical old eyes.

"The fate of My Heir Presumptive lies on the knees of the gods," declared Franz Joseph. "It rests with us to afford him adequate protection."

The Archduchess stepped forward, diffident, apologetic.

"Imperial Cousin, at Konopist I discovered insult to Your Sacred Majesty. Worse, a conspiracy against Your Crown."

"Insult? To Me?"

Silently the Archduchess laid the blue envelope before him.

One palsied hand trembled toward a reading glass. Stiffened fingers drew the order from its cover. Angry eyes read both command and contemptuous comment. The Emperor of Austria-Hungary turned toward the Archduchess, thoroughly aroused.

"You have produced the insult, Isabella. Explain the conspiracy."

Again that genuflecting curtsy, subtle tribute to any man's vanity.

"Imperial Cousin, Franz Ferdinand and Wilhelm of Hohenzollern plot the transfer of the Austrian *Erblander*. The Hapsburg Family properties are to be incorporated into the Germanic Confederation."

"Prove it!" Autocratic fury screamed through the command.

"I can—and shall. The Heir of Austria has bartered away our Family Territories to realize a Czech woman's ambitious dreams. The new frontiers are drawn on the geographical globe in Franz Ferdinand's study. More, a pact signed by Wilhelm and Ferdinand will be found on Franz's person—probably beneath his woven armor."

"The traitor! The incredible traitor!" stormed the octogenarian Emperor. "I shall denounce him to the Monarchs of Europe. I shall expel him from Our Most August Family. He is no longer one of

Us; he has gone over to the revolutionists. I shall leave him among them—*unprotected!*" Tremulous with anger the Emperor-King leaned against his writing table, a shaking hand clutching at his fluttering heart.

As he gasped for breath the Prince of Montenuovo possessed himself of the blue envelope, and, on the reverse of the imperial order, wrote hastily. Deftly he slipped the writing beneath the Autocrat's hand.

"If Your Imperial and Royal Majesty will deign to sign this," suggested the Controller of the Imperial Household, "the Governor-General of Bosnia shall carry out your autocratic will."

The old, old man bent over the brief document. "Yes, yes. We shall leave him among them—*unprotected!*"

His wizened face worked with senile passion. He crouched above the writing table. The imperial quill scratched across the paper. In absolute silence the two who watched him made their obeisance and,

carrying the death order, passed quickly from the presence.

* * *

The last of the Dynasts dropped into a day dream. Suddenly, like a child, he had become utterly weary. The deaf mute valet of the apartment wiped the drooling lips. The age-worn Emperor looked up dreamily at the loud ticking clock to watch, as a child watches, Time, with relentless scythe, sweeping away the few hours still left to him. Reluctantly, fearfully, he turned toward the awe inspiring *memento mori* from which the pictured faces of his dead —all clad in their shrouds—seemed to summon him to join them. "My brother, Max — Rudolph — Elizabeth. Gone—all gone. And now, Franz Ferdinand."

Faint and far-borne from a parade ground the pulsations of a military march beat softly.

God Exalt Thee, Mighty Monarch,
Ruler of our Eastern Land,
Power and Wisdom E'er Attend Thee,
Righteousness With Thee Shall Stand.

The aged Autocrat sighed as he listened, hands laid flat upon his cane top, chin resting on his trembling hands.

"The *Gott Exalte!* Countless millions have chanted that hymn—to Me! Few living men remember when I was not Sovereign. Emperor at eighteen! Power and wisdom—mine, from the Almighty Giver. Granted Me to secure happiness to My peoples. Happiness! My will was absolute. By law I kept My peoples starving, ignorant. The strong rebelled; I ordered them shot down. The weak I made mere serfs, or soldiers, doomed to work out the high ambitions of their Hereditary Lord. Righteousness! The Great Judge will demand a last accounting; how I walked in Righteousness. To-night, to-morrow, I must explain away the tears of two generations—the blood of six subject nations, wasted in avoidable wars. God knows I was forewarned. My hand at my Coronation lay on the Scripture promise, 'You shall have peace.' I swore—and reigned foresworn. War followed war. When I

face judgment my accusers will all be there—the youth of my seventy years' reign, dead, in my unwarranted wars. Slain to what purpose? To pamper my pride! To inflate my autocratic power; to enrich my favorites! Selfish ambitions which render purpose ruthless, inflame the will, make the forbidden seem permissible. Who profited? None. Neither I, nor my Empire. The curse comes home. I bear witness, I bear witness, that we kings have killed kingship. And I have ruined my country . . . Austria . . . my Austria!"

CHAPTER VII

"Dust and Ashes,
Dead and Dying . . ."

The Archduke, when leaving home, had ordered, "When I am gone, Badani, you stay here—in charge." For no perceptible reason my sense of responsibility weighed more heavily with each passing hour. I told myself it was because the atmosphere of the palace had become uncanny, because the boy princes, having been summoned to visit their Imperial Grandmother, left the vast salons and the great gardens empty and silent.

A storm was brewing down the valley of the Danube. Within the palace the sultry atmosphere was almost stifling. The air was filled with a sense of helpless pause on the eve of cyclonic catastrophe.

I stepped out on the terrace.

Beyond the rose gardens the military road climbed through the foothills to our mountain pass high on the skyline. Beneath the drifting cloud-wrack the little world of Konopist lay breathless, silent, waiting. Not a leaf stirred. Inexorably the roses dropped their petals.

Mademoiselle came out to me through the Long Gallery. Pale from the strange heat her sensitive face was white as her girlish dress. She laid a big silk bag on a low table, spread her filmy skirt and sat down. It was delightful to have her appear in such casual, familiar fashion. Even her gown was a pleasure. I had never seen her so daintily clad. Draped in gauzy muslin her small, slight figure was perfectly proportioned as a Tanagra statuette.

"Is this some new Indian stuff?" I ventured, drawing a deep chair beside hers.

A half shy, entirely friendly, smile flashed for an instant.

"They call it organdie," she replied sedately. "It is, probably, as old as India."

We laughed. I held up the gay silk bag.

"That," she admonished, "must be treated with respect; it is my mending catch-all." She opened it apron-wise upon her knee. Then, quite simply, "Count Badani, it is a real pleasure to be left alone at Konopist, especially when you are with me. I do enjoy vacation, but I miss the children. Without them I am actually lonely. Captain, do you ever have the glooms?"

"Often," I told her with due solemnity.

Again we laughed.

Mademoiselle took out her stitchery. I had never seen her sew. The homely mystery of needle-threading enthralled me. When she unfolded a strip of pale yellow silk and set a hairlike needle against the folded hem I watched her in satisfied silence. It was good to be treated as a trusted friend. Dare I tell her so?

"Do smoke, Count Badani."

"Shall I read to you?"

"Isn't it more interesting to talk?"

My nod approved her decision. But, for an embarrassed moment, neither of us

spoke. Then Mademoiselle said nervously, "I wish we had some news from Serajevo. Her Highness did wisely to accompany the Archduke. It is so much easier to go to an excitement than from one."

"It is, when a woman has courage."

"What is courage?"

"Surely it is a willingness to sacrifice comfort, even happiness, to achieve a fine ideal, a great hope, a more intense quality of life."

"Ah, but people always exaggerate the importance of things they have not. For instance, only the Imperials know how miserable they are. No one else would believe it."

"Do you include our Duchess? Her hope, like all hope, is a lottery. But, as the world judges success, she has succeeded."

"How does the world judge a woman's success?"

"Some cynic has said, 'By counting the number of her enemies'."

Mademoiselle shook her head at me reproachfully.

"Most of Her Highness's enemies have themselves to blame. What could the Duchess do but resent their attitude? Contempt is an insult which stings more sharply than injury."

"Be fair, Mademoiselle. The quickest way to make your in-laws hate you is to begin by hating your in-laws."

"Granted. But can you blame the Duchess? Being a woman she saw one side of a situation so clearly that she did not see the other side at all."

Pausing, she eyed me with a quaint assumption of her schoolmistress manner. Her rippling laughter, her iridescent wit, were as gilding to the lily. Each of us had forgotten the choking sense of approaching peril. Mademoiselle bit off her sewing silk and folded Ernsti's yellow tie. With an air of quiet contentment she drew a film of lace from her work bag.

"Her Highness's cuff. See how Zizka dragged the frail mesh with her heavy

paw?" She held out the lace. I bent over it for an unconscionable minute. If I dare kiss her hand.

Mademoiselle, quite oblivious, looked across the great garden.

"How dark it grows! Look, Count, a messenger is riding up the avenue."

In a moment the man dismounted and came to us on the terrace. "For Mademoiselle," he explained, producing an envelope. "From His Highness, Prince Max of Hohenberg. My orders were, 'There is no answer'." He saluted and departed.

"Oh, lovely," smiled Mademoiselle, and opened her letter. "Listen," she admonished me, "this is also for you. Prince Max writes . . . 'Grandmamma wants us to stay with her until after to-morrow. There is going to be an awful storm. We are not afraid, but we wish that Father were with us'."

"Is that all?"

She glanced toward me a little shyly. "Not quite all," she admitted. "Ernsti adds,

'Please kiss Zizka for me, and—and give Count Badani a hug'."

My heart beat response: "You darling, you honest, alluring darling."

Humbly I asked, "Must I consider myself embraced?"

Mademoiselle's attitude became severe. Her small, exquisitely shaped head bent over her needlework. I had, quite consciously, crossed the invisible line which, for her, defined the permitted and the forbidden. My mind's eye saw the Nuns in the convent erecting that irrevocable barrier. A sudden chill wind, breath of the coming storm, wailed through the foothills.

"How dark it grows, Count. I can hardly see in this strange twilight. This threatens to be a hurricane. Presently we must watch it from the terrace. When I reach home I shall wish to remember."

My heart missed a beat. "Are you planning to leave us?"

She looked at me introspectively. "Surely no one would wish to live here until they grew old."

That was what Max had told me! "Can you imagine yourself growing old?" I asked.

Mademoiselle laughed lightly—the last time I was to hear her carefree laugh at Konopist. "When I think of myself grown old I never think of a palace. Instead I imagine a little house set in a big garden—a wee, little house, with two boys like Max and Ernsti." Her frank smile invited response.

"And the boys' father—has he emerged from the future?"

In grave silence she laid aside the mended lace and began to repair a man's glove. I observed the reproof without comment. Mademoiselle must have known that I knew the gauntlet was Max Revertera's.

Apropos of nothing I said didactically, "It is so intriguing to be warned." Her brows achieved a frown, but all the while her eyes smiled. Apropos of nothing she observed, "Most women are not quite so dull as most men like to think them."

I bent forward, elbows on knees. "A

man who thinks he knows even one woman —knows none."

"True," she observed, "and by the same token, as we say in Ireland, a woman who knows one man, knows all men."

"Is that why most women assemble adorers as Fiji belles collect bangles?"

"Bless you, how should I know? The Nuns in the convent always warned us, 'What shall it profit a girl to win many admirers, if she loses the one man she really wishes to marry?' "

Her brown eyes, entirely serious, held me from laughter. The Nuns in the convent. Ye Gods!

"Ah, Mademoiselle, how can the 'one man a girl really wishes to marry . . .' "

Spurred heels clashed on the terrace tiling. Mademoiselle drew an audible nervous breath. Then we caught sight of Revertera striding toward us. Revertera, hollow-eyed, exhausted, lips too parched to return our astonished greeting.

"Good God, Max, what has happened?"

"The Archduke is dead."

"When?"

"How?"

"This morning, in the streets of Serajevo. All communication with the outside world is cut off. Sentinels with loaded rifles are standing guard over all telegraph operators. I commandeered one of the new pursuit planes to reach here."

He reeled from fatigue. Mademoiselle's capable fingers flew to loosen the close, high collar of his tunic. Her palms chafed his flaccid wrists.

"Bring cognac," she commanded.

I sped to the Archduke's study. As I went I could hear Max, unmanned though he was, pleading hoarsely, "Don't, dear Mademoiselle, please don't."

Returning I overheard Mademoiselle saying, "Ah, but I want to do it!" her voice low and eager, edged, as always in moments of excitement, with that echo of an accent which gave it piquancy. Revertera's pleading glance met her pitying eyes without flinching. Bowing his tall head he carried both her hands to his lips. None of

us looked at the other. There are moments too tense for silence.

"Drink this, old man," I said. He swallowed at a gulp; made a brave effort at composure.

A few hot drops splashed from the darkening sky. Intermittent thunder rolled from buttress to buttress of our foothills. Mademoiselle shivered with nervousness.

Revertera, turning, caught up her garden cloak, the long, madder-red, Connemara peasant's cloak in which she had first bewitched us. With tender thoughtfulness he laid its full folds about her shoulders, holding the wide hood until she arranged it upon her hair.

Darkness descended upon the garden of Konopist.

Crash!

A titanic rumbling shook the palace to its foundations. The rain descended in solid rods, pouring off the glass roof over the terrace. Jagged rivers of fire streamed from high heavens onto the gigantic arc of the Carpathians.

"Count Max, tell us."

Unconsciously he flinched. Then: "Despite our conquest, Serajevo is still Turkish—a huge village—a huddle of white domed houses crushed against steep, sterile hillsides. Twisting lanelike streets follow a narrow valley; ramshackle arcades, festooned with ragged capets against the fierce sunlight. The place is gorged with the riff-raff of the unchanging East clamoring all the tongues of the Orient. Hardly a European, certainly not a friendly face."

I watched Max as he spoke slowly. He was using words to postpone an inevitable something. Nervously he resumed, "As Franz Ferdinand arrived joy bells pealing from churches were smothered by the crash of cannon saluting the 'Conqueror of Bosnia.' Trust a Balkan people to interpret that symbol. Czechs and Slovaks scattered through the congested streets raised their war hymn:

'The Russians are with us,
And those who withstand us,
We Slavs shall destroy!'

Moslems, thinking of their City of the Sultan, growled protest. A *Muezzin* in blood red robe, high on a white minaret against the steel blue sky, chanted stridently:

'Allah Illah.....Illah Allah!
Mahomet alone is God's prophet!'

The age-old, serpent sting to Christian Austria!

"I rode through the milling crowd . . . a segment of the Inferno. All the Arch-Demons were there. I met Russia's official Assassin; he was walking amicably with the *Komit-idji* who shot George of Greece."

"But the Field-Marshal Potierek?"

"Ignored the Archduke's enemies; ordered search of the Archduke's luggage."

"Good Lord, Max, for what?"

"For a piece of initialed parchment—the 'War Pact of Konopist'."

Mademoiselle's white face became strained. "Did the Archduke know?"

"Yes, I told him."

"Did Her Highness hear you?"

"Again, yes. We stood in the court of the Konak. The Duchess refused to seek

safety. 'Franz,' she declared, 'where you go, I go. Greatness must be dearly bought. Whatever happens, I—I am happy as any Queen.'

"During the royal progress the Field-Marshal rode beside the imperial motor car. The Archduke seemed to expect attack. Moving slowly through the dim bazaar the Duchess saw, in the Oriental throng, an aged man carrying a scythe. He looked like the familiar figure of Death. When Her Highness glanced again 'Death' smiled on her like an old friend. Below the Konak she saw him for the third time. He was talking with the Black Hand, Tankeavitch, he who butchered Queen Draga. Her Highness shuddered. A bomb fell into the motor car's open hood; the Archduke tossed it instantly into the street. It exploded. The crowd chuckled; the sinister, furtive laughter of an insurgent people whose city gates already imprison their enemy. The Duchess heard, and understood. She pleaded with her husband to at once leave Serajevo. Field-Marshal

Potierek challenged His Highness to remain. Half an hour later a Slav boy, standing on the curb, shot the Heir of Austria. He knew that Franz Ferdinand wore armor."

"Max, that is impossible; none knew it but three Imperials—and myself."

"Strange. The assassin aimed at the Archduke's throat. Franz Ferdinand rose in the car rigid and accusing. He did not seem to realize that he was wounded. The Duchess threw herself before her husband to protect him. He cried, in a loud voice, 'Sophie, you must live—you must live for our children'."

Mademoiselle was weeping. "There is no love so undying as married love . . . when—when there are children," she said softly.

Max made a visible effort to continue.

"The Archduke sank down on the floor of the car. The Field-Marshal stared into the tonneau, then ordered the body carried back to the Konak. There he locked himself in with it and, for half an hour,

searched His Highness's clothing for papers. When Potierek reappeared he was baffled, angry. He had not found the pact of Konopist!"

"Oh, don't! Please don't! Tell us instead of Her Highness. When will she . . ."

Max rose. Instinctively we rose with him. His black eyes held fierce intimations. Instantly I knew what he had shrunk from telling.

"Count Max!" Her clasped hands pleaded. "What of the Duchess?"

"The Duchess, also, is dead!"

"Basil!"

Through the numbing silence I heard her cry, grief-stricken, pleading protection. "Basil, dear Basil, the children—the little, lonely children!' She looked like a child herself in her girlish gown, with the wide hood falling back from her hair.

Instinctively my arms went out to her. She came to them frankly, gladly.

"Carmel!"

Low sobs were the only answer; the sobs of a frightened child who realizes that in

the midst of terror she has been snatched to safety.

Somewhere behind us a door closed, softly.

Out of dim distance that was yesterday Mademoiselle's voice sounded eerily, "*Did you ever feel that this castle is haunted . . . as if a bell would toll and we would all vanish . . . leaving the great rooms peopled with our ghosts, the gardens filled with fading roses?*"

I looked down. She raised a tear-wet face and laid a trembling hand on my shoulder.

"Basil . . . My Basil."

Flash after flash, the lightning illumined the devastation of the great garden. Vaguely I realized that Franz Ferdinand and the Duchess lay dead amid the ruin of their dreams; that our little world had fallen into chaos. And, for the moment, I did not care. Nothing mattered so long as that dear face lay against my heart, that tense little hand clung to my shoulder for protection.

"Dear heart," I chided tenderly, "you must be brave. Inevitably this means war —the war which Wilhelm of Hohenzollern schemed lest Republicanism sweep Europe, the war which Franz Ferdinand needed to realize his plans."

"They have reaped as they have sown," she whispered, "but we, of all the world, shall not blame them."

"Carmel, you of all the world, may yet serve Her Highness."

She raised her head to listen.

"The Emperor's Grand Chamberlain, the Archduchess, the Field-Marshal, all, *all* have failed to find the Pact of Konopist."

"Basil! The black fan!"

In another moment she had led me from the terrace into the Archduke's study, crossed the wide room to His Highness's work table, unlocked the center drawer and lifted, for an instant, a flutter of black feathers.

"They will not come back before the roses fade," she said gently, "but, when Her Highness returns, we shall lay this

under her guarding hands. In spite of all her enemies she will carry it with her between the worlds. Were it found, it would be used against her children. A mother never dies."

Without protest she permitted my arm about her, rested her throbbing head against my shoulder.

"Carmel," I rallied her, "suppose the 'Nuns in the convent . . .' "

"The Nuns in the convent are very sensible women. Once I had chosen . . ."

Max! I had forgotten him! "If she chooses you," he had said. Mademoiselle —that is, Carmel—felt my shoulder stiffen. She looked up bewildered, anxious.

"I thought I heard hoof beats," I told her. She faced me motionless, listening.

"Count Max!"

It was Carmel's voice, pitiful, understanding, but not regretful. Hand clasped in hand we sped down the Long Gallery back to the terrace. An escort of Cavalry of the Guard clattered down the steep driveway.

"Max! MAX!"

Our voices calling in unison must have reached him. But even as we called we knew that he would not return.

Great sheets of lightning flooded the stricken valley with lurid light. As the military road mounted the height he turned in the saddle and saw us. One hand signalled a last salute. Then his face, curiously boyish in the distance, lifted toward our mountain pass and the shadowy ranges beyond. The fate he had foreseen on the night of decision was coming to meet him.

The thunder roared in mighty rumblings, detonating like a thousand titanic guns. Between the reverberations we could hear echoing round the horizon the ghostly hoof beats of assembling horsemen.

"Listen, Basil!"

"The Echo!"

Most men in South Eastern Europe knew from rumor of that aerial warning. Noted before the Balkan battles in the 1912 struggle against Serbia, recurrent the next year when red ruin swept Bulgaria; out of the

Nearer East it drifted eerily into the mid-summer of 'Fourteen . . . the far-borne echo of thunderous hoof beats, the *clip-clop, clip-clop* of Balkan cavalry mobilizing . . . mobilizing for war!

The End

Boston Public Library
Central Library, Copley Square

Division of
Reference and Research Services

The Date Due Card in the pocket indicates the date on or before which this book should be returned to the Library.

Please do not remove cards from this pocket.

BOSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY
3 9999 05471 3944